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TOM GENUFLEX



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TOM GENUFLEX.

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Tom Genuflex

OR

‘LIFE’S LITTLE DAY’

BY

AUNT CHERRY



Copies to be had of the writer at Llwyn-y-brain,
Whitland, South Wales

1901

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W. SPURRELL AND SON, CARMARTHEN.

TOM GENUFLEX.



CHAPTER I.

A GARDEN PARTY.



SMALL garden party had assembled at Barfield Rectory one fine afternoon in early May, consisting chiefly of the school friends of the Rector's only daughter, Grace—a lively girl of sixteen years. Conspicuous amongst her visitors shone Desirée Meudon, a radiant and most animated French girl—the daughter of a French pastor of slender means. Owing to his poverty he was glad that the expense of his daughter's education should be reduced in consideration that she should give some instruction in French, and especially that she should converse in her own language with the elder pupils at Barfield High School.

They, in return, spoke English to her; but as the English people, as a rule, are not so polite as the French, it is doubtful whether Desirée's knowledge of English progressed as favourably as her school-fellows' knowledge of French did.

Some of them—and Grace was not innocent—would teach her the most outlandish English which it was


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possible for them to use. It was not absolutely incorrect, but it was quaint and far-fetched. They and their fellows were delighted with the result and persuaded Desirée that she was rapidly perfecting her knowledge of the English language—to Desirée's great satisfaction.

The Rector's nephew, Frank Bourne, the only son and heir of the Squire of Lapton, had been for the last year or so (since he had left school) 'reading' with his uncle in preparation for his entry upon a University career, and was on this day the most inspiring and popular member of the party.

Besides him there was only one gentleman present—Dr. Bourne's new curate, Mr. Genuflex, a son of the Vicar of Lapton, and a protégé of the Squire of that place.

Tom Genuflex was fresh from Oxford, and deeply imbued with High Church doctrines, and being conscientious and zealous, and moreover, having sworn himself to celibacy, he felt his position on this bright spring day amongst so many girls and women to be a difficult one. He was naturally retiring; still, he was susceptible to beauty, and especially to sympathy, so readily, naturally, and innocently extended by the best women to men—good or bad. He wore at his side, under his long clerical coat, a silver-gilt Crucifix. He loved that Crucifix. Besides being in effigy an epitome of his Faith, he found it a constant reminder of and a help to perform his duties. When his fingers came in contact with it he became strong to resist temptation, to banish worldly thoughts, to overcome the pleasant languor which filled



mind and body, when his mind dwelt on the dangerous delights of the world. This day, in the beautiful Rectory garden, the air laden with the scent of hyacinths and violets, and the sight dazzled by the laburnum's golden cascades, the snowy blossoms of the double-flowering cherry, or the blood-red mantle of the scarlet thorn, and with silvery voices and rippling laughter filling his ears as he watched the supple forms of these girls playing tennis, and their feet twinkling over the shaven lawn, Tom Genufflex felt himself to be, indeed, in peril. Often he sought the Cross, and even occasionally covertly pressed it to his lips as he murmured his most often-used petition, 'Lead us not into temptation.'

Having finished their games of tennis and croquet, and been refreshed with tea and various dainty cakes and confections, and most luscious and acceptable grapes from the Rectory hot-house, the girls seemed disposed to linger in the verandah for a merry chat—the beautiful and very amusing French girl being the centre of attraction. They talked of their games and of their hobbies, and at last became deeply involved in a discussion about their favourite flowers, being inspired thereto by the lovely show of spring flowers which surrounded them. Not more beautiful a picture did the fritillarias, chinodoxas, primroses, and hyacinths make than did that group of women and girls with the swaying trails of the climbing roses—already in bud—framing them. The three arches of the verandah surrounding the grouped figures formed a unique triptych.

'You all seem deeply interested in flowers!' said Frank Bourne; 'supposing that we get up a flower show? Hands up those who would like to!'

Eagerly were arms tossed aloft and hands clapped—even over their heads, and excited voices cried approval.

'What do you say, Aunt Laura?' said Frank to Mrs. Bourne.

'If your uncle approve I will gladly join in your project.'

Dr. Bourne's kind face beamed with pleasure as he expressed his glad approbation, and spoke a few appropriate words on floriculture and arboriculture. Then turning to the curate, 'I hope you will be able to help our young friends, Mr. Genuflex.'

The young clergyman addressed was in appearance a boy. He looked troubled and anxious. Turning to the Vicar he said:

'Sir, it is my duty to obey you in all things possible. I shall earnestly consider this matter, and to-morrow, if not sooner, will let you know whether I can help, and to what extent; or, if higher duties prevent my taking part in this project, for your satisfaction I will enumerate what these duties may be.'

'One word will do, my good fellow, when you have made up your mind,' said the Vicar with a twinkle in his eye: 'do not let your considerations take up time which might, perhaps, as well, if not better, be devoted to doing of some kind.'

Genuflex bowed meekly, and clutched the Cross still

harder. What comfort and power there was in that bit of metal! It was tangible, and the young man felt that he had something to suffer for, something to fight for.

The girls were radiant at the idea of the show: some because they loved flowers and hoped to get a prize; some because they had, for the first time in their lives—surrounded in that lovely garden with the floral wealth of spring, and their senses intoxicated by the floods of scent and the rainbow-hues of Nature's first-fruits—become infected with the love of the Beautiful; and all because there was a gala day to look forward to and prepare for—and *such* possibilities contingent upon the event!

'Aunt Laura,' said Frank to Mrs. Bourne, 'numbers of Grace's friends have admired your flowers, and none more heartily than Desirée. It has struck me that it would interest us all much if we could get up a flower show. Do you think that it would be possible?'

'Why not?' said Mrs. Bourne. 'What would be required, it strikes me, are energy, time, and a little money. You, Frank, for one, could contribute a little of all these commodities. No doubt, Mr. Genuflex would willingly second your efforts, especially if it were for the good of the poorer people.'

Tom Genuflex bowed gravely as, saying this, Mrs. Bourne turned, smiling, towards him.

'It is a delightful project!' exclaimed Grace with enthusiasm. 'We girls would help with all our might if Frank would tell us what to do. We should have a

gala day—tents, and a band, and a crowd of people would attend. What fun! Father, do you approve?’

‘Most certainly,’ said Dr. Bourne. ‘The love of flowers and trees, of floriculture and arboriculture is most elevating to the mind and character. If you can only rouse half-a-dozen poor, and perhaps unhappy, people to add this interest to their lives, a good end will have been gained. I will gladly contribute something towards the expenses of the flower show, but I shall not expect to be called upon to give up much of my time to its affairs,’ said Dr. Bourne, smiling, ‘as between parish and literary work, visiting my friends, and other things, I find my time already over-filled. But you have my hearty approval, and I wish you every success.’

Mr. Genuflex looked askance at the girls, inwardly praying, ‘Lead us not into temptation.’ To atone for the lukewarmness of the petition, he covertly pressed to his lips the golden Cross which he wore.

He was sworn to celibacy, though as yet only in Deacon’s Orders.

Grace was handing round a dish of luscious early grapes, which were likely to be acceptable to her friends after their exertions on the tennis-ground.

‘But they are charming fruit to absorb!’ said Made-moiselle Meudon, as she daintily popped a grape into her mouth.

‘You have plenty of grapes in France, Ma’m’selle, for even poor people to eat, have you not?’ said Grace.

‘France is the blissful region! France is the enchanted

position!' exclaimed Desirée, lifting up hands and eyebrows, 'so much bulk of grapes for the worthless peoples. I could hanker after such satisfaction of grapes for the worthless peoples in dis contree!' continued Mademoiselle, her face glowing with pride.

Mrs. Bourne hastened to join in the conversation, as she saw that the young French girl's mode of expressing herself in English was trying to the politeness of her young guests. Her own daughter, Grace, had a keen sense of the humourous. It would be a *fiasco* if she failed to repress the merriment which was beginning to flash out of her merry, dark eyes. Her natural sense of politeness, however, aided by her mother's policy, saved her from after self-reproach.

CHAPTER II.

THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL.



OM GENUFLEX had diligently and carefully considered whether he could spare time to further the project of the flower show. To aid his 'considerations' he had fasted rigidly throughout one whole day, and several times he had fallen on his knees before the big Crucifix in his room, each time holding his Cross tightly in his hands. He thought he prayed when he was on his knees. Certainly his lips moved, and forms of prayer were uttered by him. Still, he knew these prayers so perfectly now, that while his lips moved, and even while his voice was audibly praying, his thoughts kept up a running accompaniment in this style:—

‘What a blessing it is to have a Crucifix!’ (with a very big C.) ‘It helps one to realise what a Saviour one has: how pathetic a figure! One could weep to see it! What could I do about the flower show? The old people would not join if I asked them, and I dare not go to the young. They are so frivolous and worldly. They look no further backward or forward than what they see just around them. They do not remember their sins, or, at any rate,

shortcomings. They laugh at Confession and Fasting. I am not quite sure that they pray; if so, perhaps it is only a form or habit with them—prayer without a soul in it.'

'How I do value this little gold Cross! especially when I cannot see the Crucifix. It keeps my mind on holy things, and makes me forget the world, conquer the flesh, and resist the devil. Did I not hear someone say "There is no devil"? How wicked! There must be, there is a devil! How else could there be so much sin? No, it would be flying into temptation if I undertook to help about the flower show, so I must say No. Perhaps I could be of some use just on the day: labelling the things, or seeing to the tent, or, or —— I love a band! and flowers too! Yes, I think I might promise to help on the day, but ' —— and aloud he cried quite earnestly, "Lead us not into temptation, oh Lord, lead us not into temptation."'

Again his thoughts ran on: 'How pretty Ma'm'selle Meudon is! she is so graceful; her every movement is *full* of grace. How animated she is! how full of life and energy! What a pity that she scoffs at holy things! If she would only consecrate her life to Christ! She is rather young yet. Dare I point out this path to her? It would be a noble sacrifice if she would become a 'sister' and take the vows of obedience and chastity! But I feel that such a life for her is impossible!'

Big drops stood upon the young man's forehead. He broke off the prayer which he was mechanically murmur-

ing and changed into an earnest reiteration of the only prayer which he seemed to utter heartily—

‘Lead me not into temptation, oh Lord, lead me not into temptation.’

A sharp knock at the door interrupted his reverie and his prayers.


‘If you please, sir,’ said his landlord, ‘that poor man who was run over this morning has had his leg amputated. Dr. Bourne has been to see him this morning and promised to ask you to go this afternoon. He is continually asking for you, sir.’

‘I will go at once,’ said Tom, hurriedly finding his hat and gloves. He pressed the Cross to his lips as he remorsefully remembered that, hours ago, his Rector had asked him to go and administer consolation, and to pray with the poor man whose case was hopeless.

‘But I have been engaged in prayer,’ he thought, self-persuasively, and succeeded in smothering his self-reproach.

CHAPTER III.

OLD GENUFLEX'S 'UGLY DUCKLING.'

OM GENUFLEX was the son of the Vicar of Lapton. His father was an Evangelical of the deepest dye—a clever man, but lazy and narrow-minded. To him Rome was the Babylon of the Revelation; Roman Catholicism—the Scarlet Lady; Fasting, Penance, Confession, Prayers for the Dead, Incense, Ritual, in any and every shape, were the 'Abomination of desolation.'

His extreme bigotry was the fault of the Rev. Mr. Genuflex (senior's) education, not of his disposition. He imbibed Evangelicalism with his mother's milk, and swallowed it before, and with, and after every meal in his childhood; and at every lesson and lecture at home and at the Theological College (only), where he had been prepared for Holy Orders.

His wife's mission in the world seemed to be to produce and nurture infant after infant to the number of thirteen. If, at the outset of her married life, her ideas soared into the, to her, unknown world (and to, perhaps, still less known and more intangible worlds), who can wonder that her flights of imagination became more and more

confined, until at length her mind was chained to her home and to her nursery? Even her husband's parish had, at last, little part in her life and thoughts. The house-keeper at Lapton Hall relieved her of ministering to the bodily wants of the poor and sick; and the Squire, Mr. Bourne, provided her husband with ample means to relieve the necessities of the poor—money, blankets, meat, and coal were doled out in plenty at Christmas-time, and whenever there might be special need.

Nor did Mr. Bourne overlook the poverty and heavy struggle of the man whom he had presented to the vicarage of Lapton. Many a cheque and many a present of game found their way to the vicarage from the squire.

When Tom Genuflex, the vicar's eldest son, had creditably passed through the Grammar School at Kirkton, it was through the kindness of Mr. Bourne that he became tutor to the young sons of one of his friends. When Tom was eighteen years old, it was again through Mr. Bourne's influence that he obtained a Bible-clerkship at Oxford, which, with a small scholarship and an exhibition, enabled him to have a University career.

Bitterly, however, did old Genuflex repent that he had sent his son to Oxford—'that hot-bed of Ritualism, and nursery for Romanists!'

Tom's intelligence was of a high order. Silently he saw, silently he listened to many a new thing. He had been accustomed to hear the High Church party denounced as traitors to the 'Protestant Church,' as perjurers, liars, deceivers. He found them of all sorts;



but he found some amongst them religious, morally brave, zealous, self-denying, active in doing good.

When Tom had long noted and considered this party and their lives, and compared it with the lives of such of his compeers as seemed to belong to his father's school of thought, he made a resolution. This was—that Tom Genuflex, born and bred and brought up an Evangelical, would, from henceforth, pin his faith to Pusey and Keble and Denison, and become, and to the end remain, a High Churchman.

This was during his second year at college. One of his first acts of zeal and self-denial was to write and inform his father of his adherence to the newly-developed (or shall we call it re-developed?) school of thought. He had his reward, for his father's vials of 'righteous' indignation filled him with an ecstasy of suffering. His father's anger had always been something dreadful; it used to fill his mother's heart with fear and her limbs with trembling; and often had his brothers and sisters hidden to escape from its results. Yet now it filled him with delirious joy. What had Tom's acknowledgment of his new articles of faith brought on his devoted head? A beloved, though dreaded, father's anger. How privileged he was thus to be allowed to suffer for his convictions! That was to be, in some small degree, like the early martyrs—those blessed persons of whom, until now, he had heard so little.

Tom Genuflex had hitherto been the poor son of a poor clergyman—one of a large, half-fed family; but now, oh!

delightful! he was a young man of intelligence and spirit; able to weigh two sides of a question, to form opinions, and, more than all, to possess the courage of those opinions—even to suffer for them. Certainly it was anomalous that this very suffering was enjoyment—exquisite delight, but this idea did not strike him, or, if it did, it was of so little importance that he set it aside to be considered at some future time.

So Tom fasted and prayed and read 'Essays and Reviews,' and, in addition to his class-work and lectures, committed many of Keble's and Neale's hymns and fragments of Thomas à Kempis' 'Imitation' to memory. On his knees in his little Oratory (which was a portion of his sitting room curtained off) he would bewail his heinous sins and, imploringly fixing his eyes on the large Crucifix which hung over his prayer-desk, would beg for forgiveness and for strength to fight his battle manfully.

The 'battle' in his mind was the fight of words which must take place when he went home for 'the long.'

Never was Tom absent from chapel—'Matins' as he loved to call the service. He also found opportunity for Confession, and did Penance for his black sins (poor boy! I wot your confessor inwardly smiled at what seemed so heinous to you and filled you with so much fear and shame!) and received Absolution. Afterwards he dared to take part in the Mass—the Sacrifice for sin!

What shall we say of him, praise or blame? Who can tell? At any rate, it was very human for a lad to revolt when he found that what he had been taught to look



upon as black and sinful was holy and full of light and comfort and strength. No one blamed Ned Hartland, who left Oxford as a red-hot Ritualist, when he revolted from Ritualism and became an earnest Evangelical—a pattern squire, and withal a literary man, lashing at the revival of Ritualism or Symbolism with its man-millinery and Romeward tendencies in many an able essay and article, calling these things ‘dry husks’ in comparison with the spiritual religion of the ‘Protestant Church.’ Which was right? Who shall say?

Both Tom and his father survived the memorable battle of words which took place between them. Old Genuflex at one time contemplated removing Tom from Oxford, but worldly wisdom prevailed over spiritual fear; and as Tom bid fair to be a class-man, he was suffered to continue his course.

To the father's bitter wail over his son's defection, Mr. Bourne encouragingly replied: ‘Tut, tut, all must be moving in this world up or down. Tom will soon find his level.’

So Tom, when he apologetically mentioned his change of opinions to the squire at luncheon one day, Mr. Bourne said: ‘Use your judgment, Tom, you have plenty of intelligence. Whatever your opinions may be when they are formed, have the courage of them.’

CHAPTER IV.

TOM'S FIRST SERMON.

WHEN Tom passed out of Oxford as a first class man, and was anxious to be ordained, Mr. Bourne got his brother, the rector of Barfield, to give him the necessary 'title.' Having creditably passed the bishop's examination and had the distinction of being Gospeller at the Ordination Service, the new curate was, in anticipation, announced by Mrs. Bourne to her visitors as 'a most promising young man.'

All Barfield was on the tip-toe of expectation and curiosity to see him.

On his first Sunday the Church was crammed full of people—Churchmen and Dissenters. All eyes were turned to the vestry door; every sound was hushed until the soft sounds of the opening Voluntary announced the entrance of the clergy. Then the congregation stood up, and while 'flute' and 'gamba' seemed to ask and answer questions in dulcet tones, Dr. Bourne, pleasant-looking, yet dignified, walked across the chancel to the reading-desk, and burying his head in his ample cambric sleeves, was for a few moments engaged in prayer.

None noted the rector, however, for he had been

followed out of the vestry by 'the new curate!'—the 'promising young man.'

With head bent he issued through the door. His cassock touched the ground. His spare, spotless surplice was so short that he could easily clutch hold of the golden Cross which hung above the long fringed ends of his girdle, and which he only relinquished to mark his forehead and his breast with the sign of the Cross as he meekly bowed, then knelt, before the Altar-rails. The golden fringe of his rich white silken and becrossed stole trailed upon the encaustic-tiled pavement as he did so. Then—again clutching his Cross (for it was his first time of officiating, and he was nervous)—he seated himself to face the Altar. He was rather tall, clean-shaven, pale, and boyish-looking. His voice, when he read the lessons and the Gospel, was clear and pleasant; but he had a trick of turning up his eyes now and then, and of never looking further than his book or his fingers, which gave one the feeling of his being something apart from his fellows and from the world.

Dr. Bourne preached.

Service over, the organ pealed out Handel's 'March in Scipio' while the large congregation, filled with excitement, streamed out of Church. Scarcely had they reached the great west door when comments upon 'the new curate' were freely exchanged.

'Well,' said Mrs. Brock, the ironmonger's wife, 'this must be one of the High Churchmen I have heard talk about. He is a good-looking boy, but pale—with fasting,
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I suppose—and too much afraid to use his eyes for fear of seeing “the devil and all his works.”’

‘He is dressed very pretty,’ said Mrs. Lamb of the ‘Hankerton Arms Hotel,’ but I misdoubt me about these new-fangled ways. He is to preach this evening, and I shall come to hear him before I make up my mind about him.’

One of the deacons of the Baptist meeting-house had ventured to breathe the same air as Church-people, and, with two or three of his fellow-members, was—in a low mysterious voice—discussing Mr. Genuflex.

‘Well! of all the Popish hypocrites, this youngster beats them all that ever I saw! A Cross on his side (and often in his hand too), Crosses on his raiment, and—forsooth!—that is not enough, but he must mark Crosses on his forehead and on his breast too! Surely, he is fond of the ‘mark of the beast!’

‘And looking, or trying to look, so modest too!’ said another, ‘with his eyes on the ground or up to the sky—so saintly! I have no patience with such hypocrisy!’

‘Brother James,’ said another, ‘you must go to hear his sermon to-night to be able to condemn his doctrine as well as his dress. The “itching ears” of our own people and their hungry eyes will be led astray unless, for always the people follow him “who loveth and maketh a lie.”’

Their heads wagged ominously: sigh after sigh and groan after groan issued from the internal regions of these godly men who were so anxious for the spiritual welfare of the people of Barfield. Had not several of their

members already left the Baptist chapel for the Church, and all of them of the better lower-class too? Should there be more defections? How could the preacher's salary be made up?

When Tom Genuflex reached the pulpit in the evening to deliver his first sermon, he felt, rather than saw, that the Church was again crowded. All who had been there in the morning had come again—fascinated by the unusual appearance of this young man, and anxious to hear him preach. Those poor mothers and servants who had stayed at home to cook 'the Sunday dinner,' and those poor men who had, as usual, stayed in bed until noon, or lounged at home with the newspaper; and even some few who never darkened the doors of Church or chapel, but had heard that the curate was a 'raree-show,' were there in addition to those who had attended the morning service.

When he had reached the pulpit, Tom Genuflex Crossed himself as he repeated the Invocation; then—for a few moments—he paused. So great was the silence that the dropping of a pin might have been heard.

He delivered his text in a low, clear voice, slowly, and pausing at the end of it.

'In the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews, and in the eighteenth verse, you will find these words: "Pray for us."'

'My brothers and sisters, I stand before you for the first time as the ambassador of Christ, charged with His message of love to you; but also charged with His de-

nunciation of sin and His declaration of the punishment which must follow sin.

But I would have you to bear in mind, that though I occupy the proud position of the ambassador of the King of Glory, I feel myself to be smaller than the mote which floats in the sunbeam. But for the oft-applied and cleansing Blood of Christ (which flows afresh and perennial whenever we offer up the blessed Sacrament of His most precious Blood) I should feel myself to be more deeply dyed with the guilt of sin than the most abject wretch whose soul is crushed into the earth—nay, into Hell itself—with the weight of its enormous and horrible iniquities.

‘Knowing, then, my own weakness, my own sinfulness; grieving continually because of the power which “the world, the flesh, and the devil” have over me, I have chosen these words as my text. Humbly I ask each one of you, even the youngest and the weakest of you, to “pray for” me. Pray that my feet may be kept in the footprints of our Lord and those saintly followers of Him who did not hesitate to follow Him unto shame and unto death, who “had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented: of whom the world was not worthy.” Yes, pray that I may have grace from heaven and strength from the reverent partaking of the Holy Communion to keep my Ordination-

vows, and be a faithful teacher to those to whom I am sent, by example and by precept. Pray that through "good report and through evil report" I may entirely forget myself except as a humble worker in Christ's Vineyard—the Church; that I may be diligent, single-hearted, and as one who follows his Master, though at an immeasurable distance. Pray that my heart may be kept tender so as to be able—for Christ's sake—to minister gladly to the most abandoned sinner; that my mind may be kept free from bitterness, though I meet with opposition, even persecution, because I fulfil my duties in the way in which, to my poor judgment, it seems right to fulfil them.'

For ten minutes or so he spoke to them in this strain. Then, waxing warmer, he ended—

'I began by asking you to pray for me. Prayer is omnipotent! It can remove mountains, overthrow kingdoms, raise the dead! Who dare say what prayer can *not* do? "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Yes, the prayer of one "righteous man!" Surely, amongst the crowd which I see before me there are many "righteous" men! If the prayer of *one* righteous man availeth much, then the prayer of *many* righteous men should be irresistible! Pray then, ye many righteous men, for God's messenger who speaks to thee and asks this boon at thy hands. Our God is a God who heareth and answereth prayer.

'And you, "babes and sucklings" in Christ, who have scarcely learned to lisp "Abba Father," add your weak


petitions to their more "effectual" ones. They, too, will "avail." Pray that my mind may be illumined, my heart enlarged, my soul strengthened, that I may be, and do—live and die—*in* Christ and His Church and *for* Christ and His Church; if, perchance, after a saintly struggle, I may have the triumph of being received into Heaven amid the chanting of these words by the heavenly choir—"Of whom the world was not worthy."

A moment he stood with eyes and arms raised Heavenward in a rapturous exaltation, then sank upon his knees and so remained until the Church was empty.

Dr. Bourne had given the Benediction.

CHAPTER V.

LAPTON VICARAGE.

NE forenoon the Vicar of Lapton walked into the kitchen, saying—

‘Emily, my dear, get dinner ready half an hour earlier to-day. It is so fine that I shall do some “visiting.” What have you for dinner?’

‘A fowl, Henry,’ replied Mrs. Genuflex. ‘It is not very young, but I thought of boiling it for an extra half hour. However, if you are in a hurry, I will soon put dinner on the table.’

Mrs. Genuflex bustled about, but with no noise, to lay the coarse clean cloth, calling Patience from her game with her brothers and little sisters in the orchard to help her about dinner.

The Parsonage at Lapton was a pretty and comfortable house, but far too small for the huge family who called it ‘Home.’ In fact, the attic and a loft over the coach-house were obliged to be used as bedrooms during the boys’ holidays. Fortunately, the house had three sitting-rooms—a small drawing-room, a dining-room (only used as such when strangers were entertained), and a good-sized breakfast-room, so called, wherein all ordinary meals

were taken, and which, with the kitchen, served as a nursery and play-room for the younger children.

Mr. Genuflex and the elder boys used the dining-room for reading and writing in: all who played on the piano were welcome to go into the drawing-room when they wanted to play or practise. In winter this liberty was of little use, as fires were seldom lit in that room; and in that northern climate the cold was often unbearable unless there was a good fire to warm by.

Mrs. Genuflex had thirteen children—only two of them being girls. She had a 'cricket eleven' of boys as she often, laughingly, used to say; for she could laugh, and laugh often and heartily too, in spite of her large family; indeed, I should have said, because of her large family. She had a crochety, irascible husband, and she had sometimes been ill and anxious—for they were as poor as any clergyman's family could be. She loved children, especially her own, and for many years she had lived for her husband and children alone. She had a hopeful, cheerful disposition, a hasty, but most forgiving temper, and a good constitution. She taught her children, played and walked with them, chatted with them, and entered heartily into all their various interests. She was 'well-born,' and had been educated as a lady. When first she had come to Lapton her hands had been white and delicately formed, and had done nothing harder than writing, drawing, or playing on musical instruments. But whatever Mrs. Genuflex did, she did with all her might, and the refined and somewhat delicate-looking

girl of long ago had become, by dint of hard work, the active, healthy-looking woman of middle age. Sheer necessity had taught her to bake and brew, to wash and iron, to cook, and to make and mend, to work in dairy and garden; in fact, to turn her hand to any and everything. Generally she had a single servant to help her, but sometimes she had none, for the house-cleaning and wash made far too much work for one servant, even with her mistress's constant help, and the wages were too small to allure any girl to stay in so hard a place. Fortunately they kept a man to attend to the cows, garden, and horse, and when there was no maid-servant the man would lend a hand 'about other things.'

Tom, the eldest son, was curate to Dr. Bourne, the Rector of Barfield. The three next boys were generally away from home, one being in a bank, another in a solicitor's office, and two others on a foundation of a good school. Patience, until now, had been educated by her mother, but she was soon to go to an Evangelical school of great repute, where her mother had spent some years of her youth. The three boys next to Patience daily attended the Grammar School at Kirkton, while the younger children, including Mercy, were taught by their mother.

Mrs. Genuflex played the organ at Church, taught at Sunday School, and held a singing-class during the week. Mr. Genuflex expected her to do these things whatever her condition or state of health might be. If, as sometimes happened during the winter, his wife took a severe

cold and lost her voice, she was lectured as though she had committed a crime. Whatever Mrs. Genuflex might suffer was lost sight of—her husband was the injured person.

Still, husband and wife loved each other, and were ready—she too ready—to overlook each other's failings.

At one o'clock Mr. Genuflex stood at the dinner-table to give the last look before she summoned the family to dinner. The large fowl, smothered in egg-sauce, looked inviting enough, and the potatoes were white and floury. A tiny square of bacon, some cabbage, a pile of slices of bread, and a jug of skimmed milk completed the supply of food for nine people.

'I do hope the fowl will not be tough, Patience' said Mrs. Genuflex to a strong girl of fourteen years who was regarding the table with significant interest.

'Never mind, mother, if it is,' replied the girl, 'there are vegetables and bacon and bread besides, and boiled rice afterwards.'

'We should not mind much, but your father, my dear!—it will make him so cross if it is tough,' said the poor woman anxiously. She replaced the cover on the dish, and, taking up a heavy hand-bell, rang it outside the parlour window.

Shouts and laughter came nearer and nearer as the children trooped into the kitchen to wash their hands and tidy their hair before dinner.

Mr. Genuflex entered the room and gave a swift, eager glance at the table. He smiled, for he was hungry and meant to enjoy his dinner.

'Say Grace, Mercy,' he said to a tiny four-year-old girl.

All stood, eagerly scanning the table while Mercy rattled off the formula—

'Fot we going to ceive may Lord make us trool thankful.'

'What a good dinner!' said Jack. 'Please give me the drumstick, father?'

Jack had never tasted any part of a fowl but the drumstick, and compared with fat bacon or boiled rice or pea-soup he thought 'drumstick' the most desirable of dinners.

By this time Mr. Genuflex was engaged in single combat with the defunct but obstinate fowl. He tugged and tugged, then re-sharpened his knife and tugged again, until he was red in the face. Then his fury burst forth.

'What do you put such a thing as this on the table for, Emily? I declare I must go and get my meals at the inn!'

Disentangling the breast from the fowl he put it upon his plate; then, pushing the dish across the table to his wife, he said:

'Here, you must carve it yourself. I cannot be bothered with it!'

He proceeded to help himself to vegetables, and then applied himself to his dinner, at the same time keeping a watchful eye on the carver.

'Remember that this fowl is to be our dinner to-

morrow, too,' he said bye and bye in a warning way to his wife.

'Yes, dear, and the broth will do for the third day,' said Mrs. Genuflex cheerfully, so though the fowl is rather tough, it will have been a great help.'

Mr. Genuflex grunted approval as he bent his head for another mouthful.

Each child had a tiny piece of meat, and they all seemed to enjoy their dinner, though one or two of them looked longingly at the dish for a moment as though they would have liked another bit of meat.

Their father's anger had gone as suddenly as it had come. He was now chatting merrily with the little ones. Jack was describing the new calf to Patience—

'I wish you had seen it! It galloped like mad over the meadow, and kicked up its heels, and stopped for a bit, then galloped again. I wonder why it went so fast!'

'It must have been tired after running about like that!' said Hal.

'It was sent into the field to-day for the first time,' said his father, 'and the sun and fresh air made it feel glad, just as it makes you glad when you run out to play after lessons are finished. I suppose you had a good game of play to-day, children?'

'We played at Moses striking the rock,' said Hal (who was ten years old). 'I had mother's old waterproof on for a dress like Moses' dress in "Line upon Line." The others were the children of Israel murmuring, and I struck the rock—that was the gate-post—so hard that

my rod broke, and, instead of murmuring, the children of Israel burst out laughing, and that made me *really* angry, and if my rod had not been broken I would have struck the rock again—much better, because I was *really* angry, like Moses.'

Mrs. Genuflex's eyes twinkled as though she would like to laugh, but old Genuflex looked stern and angry as he said—

'I am ashamed that any child of mine should have mocked at holy things in this way! Never make games about the Bible again, or I will flog you all round!'

Mr. Genuflex brought his fist down heavily upon the table until the glass and china rattled, then continued—

'I suppose, Emily, that you encourage your children in their wickedness, or you would have stopped them in their game?'

'As I was first preparing the cream to be churned, and afterwards attending to the cooking of the dinner,' replied his wife, 'I could not have known what the children were doing, Henry.'

'Then you *ought* to have known!' retorted Mr. Genuflex unreasonably.

Again, for a time, the merriment was extinguished, and dinner proceeded silently.

Children's minds are always busy, however, and when Hal was helping Patience and his mother to weed the flower-border in the afternoon, he said to his sister—

'Was papa holy at dinner, Patience?'

His mother, over-hearing his question, called out—

‘Child! what do you mean?’

‘Was father holy when he got into that temper at dinner, mother? because he said that we were not to mock holy things—Moses in a temper and the children of Israel murmuring, and things like that.’

Again Mrs. Genuflex’s sense of the ludicrous was touched, but she controlled her merriment, and, always eager to foster the children’s respect for their father, replied—

‘The Bible talks of “righteous indignation,” and tells us to “be angry and sin not”—meaning that we *ought* to be angry if people do naughty things. Your father thought that you had been doing something naughty.’

‘Do *you* think we had been naughty, mother?’ said Patience with a searching look into her mother’s face.

Mother and daughter exchanged a swift glance of intelligence, for Patience was nearly fourteen years old, and was sometimes able to sit in judgment upon her father.

‘My dear,’ said her mother to her, but looking at the younger children—for the lesson was meant for them—‘you must try to do all that your father wishes, and leave undone all that he would dislike you to do.’

Patience felt that her mother did not condemn her for helping her little sister and brothers to play ‘Moses striking the Rock.’

CHAPTER VI.

A DIVINE AND A DINNER.

THE Reverend Benjamin Holden, minister of the big, ugly Baptist chapel at Barfield, was a most respectable-looking man. Indeed, he was a saintly-looking man.

His coat was very black, and its tails very long: he wore a stock like a Ritualist clergyman, and kid gloves—black, of course—on both hands.

But it was his long, solemn face, and his habit of keeping his eyes on his toes as he walked, which was the crowning touch to his saintly appearance. He often glanced upwards, then furtively looked, first on one side, then on the other, but as though he 'loved not the world nor the things of the world,' and feared to let his looks linger long on things of Time. Frequently, too, he would clasp his hands behind him as he walked, and when his lips moved at the same time—as they sometimes did—it might suggest to an observant mind the thought that he was reiterating to himself the Apostolic injunction—'Touch not, taste not, handle not,' and, to make obedience more easy to him, was forcibly keeping

his hands from contact with the material things of this world.

The Reverend Benjamin Holden was a diligent visitor in the houses of the better-class Baptists of the town. He generally found it convenient to time his visits to be at noon or at four o'clock, so as to include a meal. These meals were always cheerfully given, for Mr. Holden had trained his people—especially the women—to believe that it was a privilege for them to 'use hospitality without grudging' to their minister—'for thereby some have entertained angels,' he used to say. His usually long and solemn face would broaden out into such a sunny smile as he said the words that some of the women used to aver that they believed that he *was* one of the angels.

Benjamin Holden was one day sitting at the table of a Mrs. Caile—a notable and godly widow, ever ready to spend and be spent for 'the cause.' A fat, savoury duck was steaming on the table, flanked by a dish of mashed turnips and a bowl of apple-sauce.

Mrs. Bennett, a lowly neighbour of Mrs. Caile, had been asked to join them.

Before they sat down, however, the Reverend Benjamin put his finger-tips together, and, turning his eyes up until only the whites were visible (see how manfully this godly man could resist temptation!) he repeated a long address to the Almighty, in which he informed Him of what many and great blessings He had showered down upon his own and his companion's unworthy heads, and almost computed how many poor people there were, even

in Barfield, who were not thus blessed. He might have offered several other items of information, but flesh and blood are weak, and the odour of roast duck strong and appetising. Mr. Holden, therefore, allowed the last hurried words of grace gradually to slide almost out of hearing, and to be at last lost in the swish of the steel upon the carving-knife as he sharpened it so as to cut up the duck in a masterly manner. He deftly severed a wing and a leg for his companions, and then, at the request of his hostess, completely dismembered the bird so as to get at the breast for himself. Both women waited upon him with sauce and vegetables, and not until they had seen that he had everything which he required did they begin their meal.

When the edge of Mr. Holden's appetite had been removed, he began to talk while he continued eating, and often with his mouth full as he talked.

'Well, Mrs. Caile, what do you think about the flower show?'

'Nay, Mr. Holden, I know not what to think. Flowers are pretty enough and innocent, but perhaps the showing of them may be a device of Satan's to puff up those with pride who take prizes, and to tempt the lads and lasses to spend money on dress and frippery, and to flaunt their finery in the face of the public. What do you think about it, Mr. Holden?'

'Well, I have long and prayerfully considered this matter,' said the minister, 'especially as some of our friends have good flowers. There is Mr. Brier, the florist,

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and Mr. Spence and Mr. Tait, the market-gardeners, and several of our people who have a brave show of flowers in their gardens or windows. Human nature is weak, and these might chafe if they might not try for prizes and honours the same as the churchpeople. So, as flowers are, as you say, innocent, if not of much use, and as there will probably be neither drinking nor gambling connected with the show, I mean to announce next Sunday that I approve of our people joining in it.'

'Indeed, you shew a Christian forbearance and charity,' said Mrs. Bennett, 'and set the churchpeople an example. Look at them!—not one of them, especially their ministers, will darken the doors of our chapel!'

'No,' said Mrs. Caile, 'though many of us go now and again to the church. But as long as that Papish Genuflex is here I will not set foot in church again!'

'He is a meddling, mischievous, hypocritical sinner!' said Benjamin with warmth. 'Visiting our people, if you please!—and preaching to all the mothers to take their babies to be Christened, or they will be burnt in hell!'

'Ay, and some of the poor fools hearken to him, too,' said Mrs. Bennett, 'but it is either because they *are* fools or covetous. For Mrs. Bourne decks out mothers and babies for the Christening as they call it.'

'No good will come to them who put on clothes without working for them and earning them,' said Mrs. Caile, stroking her satin dress (she enjoyed a small competence and dressed well), 'and as to the Christening, what is there in painting a Cross on a squealing baby's

face with water, and sprinkling a few drops of water on its head to make it one of the followers of the Lord?’

‘It is a downright mockery!’ said Mr. Holden. ‘But we will have them back when they are old enough to know what they are doing.’

‘Ay, they will want to be dipped when they grow big,’ said Mrs. Bennett, ‘no drops of water can make them children of the Lord.’

‘Is Genuflex full of his nonsense yet?’ asked Mrs. Caile. ‘I heard that Dr. Bourne had been telling him that he must make his bowings and his crossings few and far between.’

‘Yes, and Dr. Bourne would not let him teach the people to confess, nor let him insist upon the necessity of fasting,’ said Mrs. Bennett.

‘I call fasting a black sin,’ said Benjamin. ‘If the Lord sends us good food we ought to eat it with thankfulness.’

By this time the minister had a pile of apple tart covered with custard on a plate before him, to which he speedily did ample justice. After he had further disposed of cheese and salad and a plateful of raw onions, he said—

‘Now, Mrs. Caile, I am a temperance-man, as you know; but, as I have before told you, my digestion is poor, and for fear that fine duck of yours will not sit easy on my stomach, pray give me a thimbleful of the brandy which you keep for medicine—like a good and thoughtful housewife as you are.’

He allowed one of his rare smiles to illumine his face

as she produced a bottle of "three-star" Cognac from her cupboard. This smile had such an effect upon the good women that they both turned their heads to the window as though they were suddenly much interested in the game of marbles which was going on in the street, but in reality to give Mr. Holden freedom to help himself according to his necessity. Apparently this was great, for he quickly tossed off half a tumbler of brandy and again poured out a more modest half-glassful. He then cleared his throat. At this signal the women lost all interest in the marbles, and, to make up for the diversion of their attention, assumed a most humbly-attentive attitude as their pastor resumed his remarks.

'No blessing attends the runagates!' said Mr. Holden. 'Just look at widow Lane! When her husband died she found plenty of work, and was able to give well to "the cause," but when young Mr. Bourne wheedled her into letting the youngster—Fred—go to Church, and to be one of the choir, and at last to be Christened, see how plainly the Lord shewed His displeasure—His anger, I may say. Why, He crippled the boy, which was worse than killing him outright. Now she cannot go out to work nor hardly earn a penny, and further—her rebellion and pride are punished by her being obliged to receive "parish help!"'

At this juncture Benjamin Holden remembered that Mrs. Lane's subscription to the chapel for the last quarter had not been paid, so, making an excuse that his work must be attended to, he hurriedly said 'good-day' to the

two women, and wended his way to Mrs. Lane's poor home.

Mrs. Lane had just been receiving her fortnightly dole of 'relief,' and she had resolved that Fred should have some little treat for his tea. The relieving officer had put down three shillings in silver on the clean-scrubbed table, and having exchanged a few cheery words with the widow and her crippled boy had wished them 'good-afternoon,' and continued his round of calls upon those who were in receipt of parish help.

Scarcely had he left when Mr. Holden marched into the room. He considered it quite unnecessary to announce his coming by a knock. Throwing a ferret-glance over the place, his eye was attracted by the glitter of the silver on the table. Having met the relieving officer just outside, he perfectly well knew what the money was, and how it had come there. It suited him, however, to appear to believe differently.

Going towards the table he deliberately gathered up the coins and put them in his pocket, saying—


'Ah! my good woman, I thought you would remember me! This is just what I came for, and you were not forgetful; you had it all ready. The Lord will bless you abundantly for upholding "the cause"—doing your part—giving the "widow's mite."'

The poor woman was literally breathless and speechless—so suddenly and cruelly was her little all wrenched from her.

Holden noticed her dismay, but under the pretence of

and minimised his Crossings and repetitions and readings. Even poor Mrs. Lane's face beamed with smiles as she finished her careful toilet by tying on a large white apron and sleeves and once more adjusted a card in the window to her own and Freddie's satisfaction. On this card was printed in big capitals, 'Refreshments,' and underneath in smaller capitals, 'Tea or coffee, with bread and butter, sixpence each.' The poor woman hoped to receive many a sixpence that day, and already was turning over in her mind what comfort she could get for her dear boy. Always of him she thought; never of herself. Oh! wonderful mother's love! Oh! pure fountain, whose spring is in Heaven at the foot of the Throne of the God who is Love! Oh! perennial stream, which links the basest with the most supernal! Ages may roll on, and yet, as ever, it upspringeth; as pure, as unselfish as when, outside Eden, our first mother enveloped her first sin-stained babe in its protecting folds, if so be she might save it from the curse of sin which her weakness had entailed upon it.

The streets of Barfield were soon thronged with people bearing baskets and trays of flowers and vegetables, and many carrying single pots. Carts laden with garden-produce neatly arranged, and flowers or plants glowing with every rainbow hue were driven to the field where the show was to be held, and where already two or three large striped and gaily-decorated pavilions had been put up. Round the entrance to this field an always-increasing crowd watched the flowers and plants



being carried in. Many a cheer was raised as some conspicuously-beautiful plant or device was taken in. Pleasant remarks were made, and jokes bandied about, and as the time for receiving the entries was up, Barfield church-bells clanged out a welcome to the gentry and country folk who crowded the town.

The great banner on the church-tower flapped lazily from the inclined pole to which it hung, plainly showing the big white Cross on its blood-red ground. Bye and bye the sound of a drum was heard, and a minute afterwards the horns and trumpets asserted themselves. Cheer after cheer rent the air as the red coats, dazzling be-plumed helmets, and brass instruments came into sight. By this time the ticket boxes were opened, and as the bandsmen marched through the gate, playing a lively air, they were followed by the carriages of ticket-holders and those who were willing to pay the two shillings charged for the first hour. At two o'clock one shilling only would be charged for entrance, and at four o'clock sixpence would obtain admission. The well-dressed gentry elicited many a hearty cheer as they passed in. The populace were in the humour to be amused, and such toilettes as these stately matrons and dowagers and sweet-faced girls had appropriately donned for the occasion were not often seen in the streets of Barfield—no, nor in its shop windows either. There was a subtle mingling of elegance and simplicity in some of these toilettes, which one might look for in vain in a shop window. Most of them shewed a refinement and individuality which was an

expression of the mind of the wearer, shewing in a way altogether inexpressible—taste and culture.

The scene in and around the pavilions was animated and pretty. Groups of well-dressed people exchanged greetings or stood admiring the beauties of the show. Stately palms, yuccas, and tree ferns, and lycopodiums lent their refreshing tints to soften the glare of crotons, dahlias, calceolarias, justicias, and begonias, while sweet scents were scattered far and wide from roses, brugmansias, heliotropes, carnations, aloysias, and other sweet-smelling plants; while caladiums, dracænas, coleus, and orchids shone in their quaint beauty on every side.

Grace had inspected the flowers in Desirée Meudon's company, not so much from the love of her society, I fear, as in the hope of amusing some of the visitors to the show by getting Desirée to make some of her quaint speeches.

'But this florid spectacle is ravishing, Grace, *ma mie!* Is not the gratification of it large? Where are your blossoms? and have they been distinguished?'

'I do not take prizes to-day, Desirée, I only sent my plants to help to fill the show.'

'Oh! and to beautify the display, I conceive,' said the French girl. 'But the robes on the elegant women are most beauteous, and the visages of them are amiable! Mr. Genuflex approaches to us. I see the corrupt Cross still hangs to his girth.'

Tom Genuflex took off his hat (a stiff low round-crowned one with a broad brim, and trimmed with cord and tassels) to the young ladies. He tried to look as

usual, but the sunshine and music and sweet sights and scents had got into his blood. As well you may tell the river to stand still or the suckling infant not to whimper for its mother as to tell a healthy young man to look grave or sad when Nature—helped by Art—is running riot around him.

‘Good day, young ladies,’ said he, ‘you are fortunate in the weather to-day. The attendance at this show seems to be enormous.’

‘I hope you feel gay and healthy, Mr. Genuflex,’ said Desirée.

‘I am well and happy, thank you, Mademoiselle Meudon. Have you seen most of the flowers?’

‘A good many, thank you; but they are charming and too many to count,’ replied Desirée.

‘I feel sure that Mr. Genuflex would only be too pleased to help you to count them, and as mother seems to be waiting for me I will leave Desirée in your charge until tea, Mr. Genuflex,’ said Grace with her sweetest smile, but with a mischievous twinkle in her eye—and flitted away.

Tom looked aghast! He had only spoken to the girls because he had found that he could not pass them without rudeness. Desirée saw the situation and determined to extract some fun out of it. As they walked on she exclaimed ‘Oh! but the music is ravishing! Does it not give delight to all your body and your intellect and your immortal spirit when the charming music bawls to us, then—so softly—grumbles in our ears, Mr. Genuflex?’

Music is the most splendid—the most precious gift. Do you find something superior to this ever?’

‘Such music as this is of earth,’ answered Genuflex, ‘I prefer Church music—Mozart’s Masses, Bach’s Fugues, Handel’s sublime “Messiah.” You ought to hear some such music as that, Mademoiselle!’

‘One day you will take me to delight in the music at the Cathedral, Mr. Genuflex? Miss Parker will readily accord the permission,’ said Desirée looking very grave as she uttered what she knew to be untrue, and then, swiftly changing the expression of her face to an alluring smile, she looked enquiringly into Tom’s face.

‘I— ah! perhaps Mrs. Bourne will take you with her daughter some day,’ said Tom, and then, fearing that he had been ungracious to a lady, he reddened, and added, ‘It would give me great pleasure, but— but—’

‘I remember,’ said Desirée quickly, ‘pardon me, it was sinful to ask you. You do not love the women: like the music, we are dirty mould. But one day you will yet find a St. Cecilia—a spiritual being, completely refined, and your heart will not strike fast while you are in an ecstasy, for she will not be the same as that naughty bulbul which makes to think of all one loves down here, but she will be like one lark chanting up—up there in the celestial place,’ and Desirée, with a roguish look, pointed with her grey-gloved finger-tip to the blue ether above them, ‘and then you—not your naughty body, but your immortal spirit, will grow too large and volatile, and need to go away from this polluted mould to the

holy place. Is it not so, Mr. Genuflex?' Desirée put on a look of childish simplicity as she asked this, so that Tom Genuflex, who had begun to suspect her of laughing at him, ended by feeling truly compassionate towards this lively, careless butterfly.

'The Bible tells us this, Mademoiselle Meudon, "Love not the world." If we do we shall forget Heaven and the thorny path that leads to it.'

'Do you not love the world one little piece?' said she.

'I try not to,' answered Tom.

'This music I know you do not love, but this green country and trees, the blue heavens and the bright beams of the sun, the kind peoples, and the excellent flowers in this' (pointing to one of the pavilions); 'do you not love all these? Why then do we see and hear all the blissful things, for it is necessary to love them all when we know them?'

'We may love them a little,' said Tom, 'but we must love best to say our prayers and go to church and do difficult things to help us to go to Heaven.'

Desirée gave a little shrug. 'Those affairs do not make me happy like the others,' she said.

Here they met the Bournes, and with a feeling of regret, though of relief too, Tom felt able to detach himself with a good grace from his worldly companion. His little chat with her had brought him into a more religious frame of mind, and feeling how much he had been influenced by the surroundings of that afternoon, he seized his Cross and hurried from the show-ground, inwardly ejaculating, 'Lead us not into temptation!'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VICAR'S WIFE.

◀ **F**MILY, just write this sermon out for me, unless you can write one of your own. I think I will go and try to get a few trout for dinner to-morrow.'

Mr. Genuflex put the open book, face downwards, upon the table at which his wife sat doing the 'Saturday's mending.' There was a pile of stockings in the basket and a heap of clean, if poor-looking, linen beside her.

'Really, Henry,' she said deprecatingly, 'I have enough work to keep me occupied until midnight, but I will do my best.'

Formerly Mrs. Genuflex—who was intelligent, and could express her ideas with ease—liked writing her husband's sermons, and her services were in constant demand. But as her family and her duties multiplied she found this writing of sermons an irksome task, and more often—at his request—copied them out of one of her husband's books of 'Sermons' than composed them. Lately she had shewn a readiness to rebel when asked to give time which she could ill spare to do her husband's work, and this, combined with an unwillingness that his daughter

should know that his wife helped him in this way, had made Mr. Genuflex less eager to ask for her help.

But to-day he had found that all his old sermons had been preached too often, and he wanted to fish, so as to have a fairly good dinner on the morrow, which would be Sunday. He did not ask her to go to write in the dining-room. He had perfect faith in his wife's loyalty to himself, and knew that she would be careful not to let Patience or any of the others know that she was writing a sermon for him. So off he went, basket on back and rod in hand, and as happy as a poor clergyman can be who has a big family and little to keep them on, and with low and limited ideas as to duty—religious, social, or family duty.

Mrs. Genuflex took up the book, turned down the leaf to keep the place, then put it under the pile of stockings in the basket, fearing that Patience would see and ask about it.

'I must finish these socks,' she thought, 'those on the children's feet are in big holes. I will go on darning until tea-time, and after the children's baths I will write the sermon.' Just then her eyes caught sight of the 'Standard,' which the Squire daily sent to her husband. She looked at it longingly, drew the sock she was darning off her hand, and stretched out her hand for the paper, casting a glance as she did so at the old leathern chair which, in the family, went by the name of 'Father's easy-chair.' Perhaps the very sight of 'Father's easy-chair' made her alter her intention to read for a quarter

of an hour. At any rate, with a long-drawn sigh, she replaced the sock upon her hand and steadily continued the darning. She looked serious, but not unhappy. She did not find her needle-work irksome. Far from that, she liked it, especially when the children were out—as they were now—or in bed. She could think her thoughts as she sewed. Sometimes she built castles in the air about her boys and about Patience (Mercy was too tiny for anything yet except to be loved and petted). Sometimes her thoughts flew back to her early home and to her brothers and sisters—all scattered now—some in the grave and some far away over the sea, and some so engrossed with their families—like herself—that she seldom heard from them, and still more seldom saw them. Would a few more years only pass before she, too, lay—almost forgotten—in the grave, and her dear ones be scattered far and wide? Then her thoughts became more abstruse and she wondered about the locality of Heaven and of the place of departed spirits, and whether her spirit would be allowed to visit her dear ones unseen, and whether her little Ruth, who died when she was three months old, was growing up, or whether she should find her still an infant. This little woman's busy mind became an inextricable labyrinth when she gave rein to her imagination, and there is no knowing where her thoughts would have led her to had not the sound of approaching children's voices suggested the prosaic idea of tea.

It was five o'clock, and as Mary was still busy 'cleaning

up for Sunday,' Mrs. Genuflex put her piles of work into the baskets, and those into a cupboard. Then she laid the table, made the tea, and set it before the fire 'to draw.' She need have no anxiety lest this process should extract enough *tannin* to injure her own and her children's digestion or nerves, for so little tea did she put into the tea-pot that it would only colour the boiling water. Then she cut a pile of thick bread and butter, the butter more thickly spread than usual because 'father would not be present to find fault with her for being extravagant.' Then she ran—Mrs. Genuflex's time was so precious that she nearly always ran or walked swiftly—to the dairy for a jug of skimmed milk.

'Here's tea all ready,' said Jack as the children trooped into the breakfast-room.

'Father has gone out,' said Patience.

'How do you know?' said her brother quickly with a surprised look, for they had only just come in from a long walk.

'Because there's plenty of butter on our bread,' said Patience, 'father would scold if he were here and saw it.'

'Father puts lumps and lumps of butter on his own bread,' said Tommy discontentedly.

'That's because he's grown up,' said Jack. 'We can do lots of nice things when we are grown up; we can have two helps of meat and lots of pudding, and stay in bed till everyone has done breakfast, and then come down to have a nice breakfast all to oneself, and an egg, or a bloater, or a bit of ham with it.'

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‘Hush!’ said Patience, ‘mother would not like to hear you talk like that.’

Mrs. Genuflex came in smiling, and put the jug of milk upon the table. Then she caught up Mercy—who had run towards her—in her arms and kissed her tenderly, afterwards putting her to sit in her high-chair at the table, and seated herself beside her and before the tea-tray.

‘Well, dears, where have you been for your walk?’ she asked; then, fearing that two or three would try to tell the same tale, she put up her hand to silence them and, turning to Mercy, said, ‘Let Mercy tell me first where she has been.’

‘In the woods, muvver, and in the water,’ said Mercy, and then took a bite out of her slice of bread.

‘In the water!’ exclaimed Mrs. Genuflex; ‘surely, Patience, this child has not wet her feet?’

‘No, mother, but she took off her shoes and stockings and walked across the brook.’

‘Then I suppose you all did so?’

‘All but me,’ said Patience, ‘but I felt the water and it was quite warm in the pools, so I thought you would not mind much, mother.’

‘Oh! no, it does not matter this warm weather, but what made the children want to go into the water?’

Patience hesitated, and the boys looked doubtingly at each other. ‘What was it, dears?’ said their mother.

‘They played that they were crossing Jordan,’ said Patience at last. ‘They wanted to go across with their

shoes on like the priests who were carrying the Ark long ago, but as they had to pretend that the brook dried when their feet touched the water, I told them it was quite as well that they should pretend that they had their shoes and stockings on.'

'We picked up twelve stones,' said Jack, 'just like the men that Joshua had chosen to pick up the stones from the bed of the brook, but it was rather awkward, for we were only five crossing, so two of us had to pretend we were three men, and the others were only two, and Patience was no use at all for she only stood and laughed at us and said it was a stupid game.'

'So it was,' said Patience, 'and you all got wet by picking up and carrying those big stones.'

'Father said he would flog us if we made games of holy things,' said Ben, 'but you will not tell, mother, will you?'

'Not this time, but you had better play at "Jack and the Bean-stalk" or "Cinderella," or some such plays as those for the future, because it is not right for you to do what your father does not like just because he cannot see you, is it?'

'But Patience says you put more butter on our bread to-night because father is not here to scold, mother!' said Hal, 'and that must be right because you did it.'

The child said this with full conviction that what he said was true. Oh! beautiful faith in a mother's goodness! All children of good women have it, and some of bad women too. The first grow up and the memory of

their mother's goodness is as a shield to them. For her sake one such honours womanhood, and if, mayhap, when sorely tempted, he falls, ay and falls again, yet the memory of his mother's purity and goodness, her truth and love, sets him anew on his feet, and bids him believe that if some women are corrupt, frivolous, and despicable, there are others—many of them—like his own mother.

But what of the children of bad women who, too soon, find out that no word uttered to them is to be relied on, that no act is too base to be committed, if only the glare of publicity does not reach it; who are not taught about conscience, nor to recognise its voice; still less are they taught any religion, save as a Shibboleth which obtains them entrance into certain 'sets' in the world; what of these? They look upon all women as the same—vain, scheming, faithless, grasping, outwardly fair perhaps, but inwardly corrupt—as were their mothers. Surely it would be better if such children had never been born!

CHAPTER IX.

A REBELLIOUS HEART.

EACH night before Tom went to rest he spent an hour in self-examination, self-accusation, and in prayer. He had a book out of which he asked himself searching questions, and before he reached the end of this catechism he used to sink very low in his own estimation, and be very ready to sink low upon his knees, and from his heart to cry, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

Generally he sat quietly with eyes bent on the ground, reviewing the events of the day before he began his self-examination.

It is in this attitude we find him on the evening of the day of the Barfield Horticultural Show. Smiles and frowns chase each other across his expressive face. See! a blush dyes his cheeks as his face is lighted up with a smile.

He is thinking of Desirée.

'She is so beautiful and bright! Her lips so full and red, her eyes mischievously gay. How graceful she is and supple, and, I think—yes, I think—so innocent. What pleasure it would be to teach her to look on life and its myriad interests and duties from a proper point of view; on death with its spiritual unions; on the great Hereafter

with its perfect re-unions. Oh! Desirée, I feel that I could love you if I might! that I could first teach you and train you, and then—when you saw things as I see them—we might go hand in hand through life together, and be for ever united, yet not together alone, but also in Christ. But no! this is only a sweet dream. No earthly marriage must be mine. Such earthly love is only a snare, a device of Satan to weaken my love for Christ and the Church, His Body!’

Tom glanced at the Crucifix, and, rising, knelt on the Prie-Dieu before it. Opening his book he began his self-examination questions. As he went on, big drops stood upon his forehead, and a dark flush passed over it. At last his book fell from his hands as he bent his head upon them on the back of the chair. Youth and the flesh were too strong for him, and, though he was on his knees, he was a rebel against God, against Christ, against the Church and the rules of the Church as interpreted and obeyed by the most spiritual and devoted of Her sons.

‘I cannot follow this life, it is too hard for me!’ he cried in agony. ‘I am flesh and blood, not marble or iron. Surely I can be good and do good without crushing all my natural instincts! Why have they been implanted in me? Why should I “rise above” my natural feelings? If I see a beautiful girl and my heart goes out to her, why is it a sin to allow my love to take possession of me? Oh! Desirée, beautiful Desirée, I love you, yes, with all my heart and nature I love you. I could take you in my arms and print sweet kisses on your rosy lips, and tell you that

my heart is all yours, and beg of you to give me your heart in return. Is this sin? There is a mistake somewhere. Nothing so sweet and pure as this can be sin. Many good, devoted clergymen marry, then why should not I?'

Tom rose to his feet. His face was transfigured. The flush had passed from his forehead to his cheeks; his eyes glowed, his lips were parted with a radiant smile. Mechanically he bent the knee and repeated the prayers which he was accustomed to say. Mechanically he removed his dressing gown and laid his head upon his pillow. His wavering had vanished, his determination had been made. He would ask Desirée to become his wife!

He dreamed of saints and angels, but every face he looked upon was Desirée's.

CHAPTER X.

GOSSIP OVER THE TEA CUPS.

MRS. Caile was paying her next-door neighbour an afternoon visit. She had removed her bonnet and replaced it with a smart cap of lace, set off with cherry-coloured ribbons, and having a big bunch of artificial flowers on the top. The tea was hot, the toast, swimming in butter, was hot, the room was hot, and Mrs. Caile was very stout; so, by consequence, she too looked hot. Her face was streaming with perspiration and as red as the roses in her cap. Frequently she mopped her face with her handkerchief, and interrupting her almost continuous gossip, would protrude her lips and gently blow as though she were an engine letting off steam. On these occasions her friend—her humble friend and admirer Mrs. Bennett—would seize the opportunity of putting in a word.

‘They do say, Mrs. Caile, that the Church here is getting quite Popish! Dr. Bourne is so easy going, and, being sure of his pay whatever comes, he lets Mr. Genuflex go on as he likes. Every morning the Curate unlocks the church himself at a quarter to eight o’clock, and rings the bell, and then he marches slowly about and bows and Crosses

himself and kneels at the railings by the Communion Table, and then bows and Crosses himself again and marches to the reading-desk, and goes through the service the same as if the church was full. More often than not there are only two or three women or girls—Miss Bourne, that young French lady, and sometimes Mrs. Bourne, and two or three old women who bow and cringe to Mr. Genuflex, thinking to get the “loaves and fishes,” as Mr. Holden says. Every Sunday too, the choir meet in the vestry before Church, and Mr. Genuflex prays over them with his eyes turned up to Heaven, while they make grimaces all round him, and then they follow him giggling into the Chancel and watch his antics, and think it fine fun to have such entertainment. I know all about it, for Joe Hames, one of the choir boys, is a friend of Jack Canton, the grocer’s boy, and he told me “everything.”

Mrs. Caile was much revived by the interval of rest from talking which she had just had, and, fanning herself with her handkerchief, took up the conversation.

‘Yes, Mrs. Bennett, and on Communion days the choir boys and the school children are allowed to sit and watch them give the Bread and Wine. Mr. Genuflex tries hard to teach them all, big and small, that the Bread and Wine turn into the real Flesh and Blood of the Lord. And there are many so dull as to believe the silly young man, and are too frightened to go to Communion any longer. After the Lord’s Supper is done, the two boys that wait upon Mr. Genuflex pour water on the Cup, and Mr. Genuflex washes it and drinks the swillings, and washes it again

and again and drinks all the swillings, and all on an empty stomach too, for he teaches the people that it is a sin to put a drop or a crumb in their mouths before they swallow the Body and Blood, and he tells them foolish things such as that if they brush their teeth before Communion not to let one drop of water go down their throats, or they must not come near the "Altar." For the table is an Altar if you please, and the Lord's Supper is the Popish Mass offered up on that Altar. Mr. Holden says, very reasonably, that they think they are wiser than our Saviour, who gave the first Lord's Supper after they were all satisfied with their usual meal. Well, I thank the Lord that I have not been brought up in the Church of England, but can eat a comfortable breakfast before I go to the Lord's Supper, and need not fear that my minister will die of stomach-ache before my eyes from drinking the cold swillings of the Cup on a wintry day!'

'No,' put in Mrs. Bennett, as her friend again protruded her lips and gently blew, 'and we can eat our bit of meat on Fridays as well as other days, and sugar in our tea, and butter on our bread all round the year, instead of "abstaining in Lent"—whenever that is—as Mr. Genuflex is teaching the school children it is the right thing to do. Right thing, indeed! It is not too much butter, or sugar, or meat that many of them get at all, and I say they ought to take such things whenever they can get them. It is no more than our duty to use all the mercies of God that we can get hold of, and to make our poor bodies as happy and as comfortable while we are here as we can.'

'That reminds me, Mrs. Bennett, that I have a sweet leg of mutton hanging for the last week. Mr. Holden called in to have a cup of tea yesterday, and he said that he never saw a prettier leg, and that encouraged me to ask him to come and carve and share it on Friday. Will you come too, Mrs. Bennett?'

'Thank you kindly,' said the woman, 'and I should not be sorry if Mr. Genuflex poked in his nose while we were at it. Friday or no Friday, it would make his mouth water!' and she laughed roguishly.

'I would give him the chance of refusing it,' said Mrs. Caile, 'but these clergy are so standoffish, they think themselves too good to sit to eat with the likes of us.'

'Did you hear that Mrs. Lane goes to church sometimes now, neighbour?'

'Don't say!' said Mrs. Caile lifting up her hands, and, with a horrified expression of countenance, 'the ungrateful rubbish that she is! Why, I gave her a coat of my poor dear husband's that had lain in the drawer ten years come Martinmas next. The moths had riddled one sleeve with holes, but I'll be bound she made a good coat for her boy out of it for all that! She shall not have a thread from me again. Church indeed!'

'I always thought,' said Mrs. Bennett, 'that the Rector and his family made too much of that woman and her boy—spoiled them in fact. Mr. Frank and Miss Grace are back and fore there for ever, and taking every delicacy to the boy as though he were a young lord. There is no use in noticing folks too much. It lifts them up so!'

‘Well, good day now then!’ said Mrs. Caile who had just taken off her cap and replaced it by her bonnet. ‘The tea was very nice, Mrs. Bennett, and the toast beautiful, and I feel quite refreshed. I hope you will enjoy the leg as much on Friday,’ and having pinned her cap under her skirt, she straightened the folds of her dress, and casting a glance at the gilt-framed mirror over the mantelpiece, and being by it reminded how much more important-looking she was than her slim and meek-looking neighbour, she sailed out of the room in a manner to impress that fact upon Mrs. Bennett’s mind.

CHAPTER XI.

LED BY A SILKEN THREAD.

WITH a woman's quick insight into 'affairs of the heart,' Desirée soon saw that the young curate had fallen under her sway.

One day he met her in one of the lovely lanes near Barfield. He had been 'visiting,' and she had been taking tea with one of the High School girls.

'Good afternoon, Mademoiselle Meudon,' said Tom, lifting his hat, 'this is an unexpected pleasure!'

He looked at the girl with an unmistakable look of admiration, blended with something softer.

'But I am ravished to look on you, Mr. Genuflex!' said Desirée. 'Is it not that we are being made into good comrades lately? and she laughed a little silver laugh, and turned her head slightly aside as she looked at her companion.

'I am so glad that you are beginning to help me with the Sunday School,' said Tom.

'It is so very sluggish to perform, Mr. Genuflex! The little ones are but malicious: they cannot keep for long without emotion. Apparently, it is barbarous to detain

them during so long time. They like more to career and scream and hop.'

Tom thought how kind Desirée was to feel for the children in this way.

'They were quiet and happy in your class last Sunday, Mademoiselle? Were they not?'

'Ah! Me it is that goes to make the children happy!' said Desirée laughing merrily. 'Me, I recount the joyous history to them until they laugh and scream at the gaiety.'

Tom thought that there ought to be no levity at Sunday School, but Desirée had evidently meant well, and looked so charming as she recounted her method of teaching that, though he felt it to be his duty to point out her mistake, he had not the courage to reprove her. 'Besides,' he thought, 'I ought not to damp her ardour at once. I must train her to help rightly.'

'It is very good of you to help in Church work,' said Tom looking straight into the laughing eyes.

For a moment those eyes looked into his own with a frank, unembarrassed gaze. Then their expression altered into a wondering interrogation, and as a faint flush rose into Desirée's cheek, and her lips curved with a bewitching smile, she said—

'It is but to approach you, Mr. Genuflex, that I take a part in this affair.'

Her eyelids drooped. Tom's heart thumped against his ribs.

'What innocence!' he thought. 'She is so young and

is motherless, and has not learned to hide her feelings. Surely, she cares for me, or she could not look like this, or say that she only came to Sunday School to meet me!’

‘I am glad that you like to see me—to be with me,’ said Tom, his face aglow, his eyes bright with the joy of loving an innocent girl, and with the dawning of conviction that this same innocent girl loved him. ‘We will try to see each other often and become good friends. To-morrow I am going to Wellfield at four o’clock to see some people there. Will you come with me, Mademoiselle? We will be back in time for tea. If Miss Parker will not let you come alone ask one of your friends to come with you.’

‘I will come,’ said Desirée resolutely. ‘But this life is happy! I wish passionately that you were always near to me to make me happy!’

The inward fire of love leaped to Tom’s eyes. He opened his lips to say something, but seeing that they were in sight of the High School he laughed gaily, only adding—

‘You are good to say that, Mademoiselle Meudon. I hope we shall be as happy to-morrow as to-day.’

They were at the gate of the school, and, lifting his hat, their hands met in a clasp which brought a bright smile and blush to the face of the lively and demonstrative French girl. Tom stood looking after her as she lightly ran up the path to the house, and was rewarded by seeing her turn after a few steps and wave her hand to her ardent admirer.

'How innocent she is!' said Tom to himself, 'just like a child!—and so warm-hearted and easily satisfied. I must not be rash, but patiently learn to know her disposition so as to judge whether it is likely she would be happy with me.'

Then his face grew grave as he thought of his broken resolutions—nay, his vow of celibacy.

'It is not fair that I should be bound by a rash vow!' he thought. 'How many have done wrong by fulfilling rash vows—Jephtha vowing to kill the first he met and it turned out to be his own daughter: Herod promising to give whatever that bold dancing-girl asked and gratifying the monstrous demand that John the Baptist's head should be given to her in a dish. What did I know of love or woman or natural desires when I took that rash vow?'

His face was grave, but determined and pleasant to look upon as he cast his vow to the depths of the dead Past, and resolved to woo and win Desirée and do more good as a married than as a single priest in the Future.

CHAPTER XII.

PATIENCE'S FIRST JOURNEY—TO SCHOOL.

◀ **A**RE we near Underthwaite yet?' Patience asked of the old man who had been sent to Barton Station to meet her.

'We're nigh upon two miles fra Underthwaite yet,' he replied, and relapsed into the silence which had been preserved ever since—an hour before—the girl had entered the 'Cumberland Cart,' or the 'Westmoreland Carriage' as one chose to call it—which had been sent from the school to carry her from the station.

Patience had left her home three hours before. It was the first time that she had been parted from her mother and the merry party of brothers and sister whom she had now discovered that she loved so much. Her mother had borne up bravely, though it was a painful wrench for her to part from the girl who of late had been as much her friend as her daughter. She had bravely kept her tears out of sight until Patience had left her, for she knew that the memory of her mother's tears would be bitter to her child when distance separated them. Now Patience felt that if her mother grieved, there was no loving daughter

to comfort her by little acts of sympathy. Mr. Genuflex had taken his daughter to the station, and with many an injunction to 'work hard to be a clever woman!' and to 'take care of your purse' (a very empty one, but for the half-a-crown which mother had slipped into her hand at parting, and which Patience thought riches indeed!), had seen the train start. Patience had felt as though she would like to cry when Kirkton Station vanished from her sight, but as the speed of the train quickened and she was whirled through a fresh country, her interest in new sights was roused, and her grief retreated for a time. She was naturally a passionate lover of nature, and her mother, having herself always found solace in sadness, and pleasure, even in pain, by communion with nature, had fostered this love in her child. Autumn's chill finger had touched the landscape in every direction; the fells rose rusty brown and bare against the cold pale blue of the sky, except where their summits were clad in the first light mantle of snow. Down in the dingles the noisy becks babbled over the boulders—inky-black here, frosty-white there—where the moss-covered rocks rent the rapids which rushed into the ravine below. Tall and straight and silvery rose the graceful silver birches against the sturdy firs, their last leaves fluttering down as the train rushed by. Troops of men and women were busy here and there in the ploughed lands, getting in the last loads of potatoes and mangels and swedes before the frost should 'touch' them. Rapidly as the scenes changed, Patience transferred them to her mind to be thought over and enjoyed—as was her wont—when

her hands were busily employed. Soon the face of the country became more open, stone walls took the place of hedges, the fells seemed nearer—almost within reach by a walk, but that was a delusion—they were miles and miles away. The woods became smaller and sparser, the villages fewer and more insignificant, the fields duller in tint. By the time the few intervening stations between Kirkton and Barton were passed, daylight was dying, and the dullness of tint had become dreary in the extreme. Patience's heart sank, and, turning her head towards the window lest her fellow passengers should curiously notice her grief, her tears fell thickly. What was this melancholy looking country into which the train was hurrying her? How different to Lapton it was! There it was beautiful wherever you turned! such green meadows by the winding river! and bosky glades leading up to the higher lands, and almost interminable woods through which the becks dashed by leaps and bounds 'to join the brimming river!' and behind, towering over all, and stretching away to the distance on either hand, the rounded fells, boulder-studded and sheep-dotted, with their bare bosoms always open to the glare of the sun, the nip of the frost, the rude touch of the impetuous winds. But what was *this* dreary country?

As these thoughts passed through her mind, the train slackened speed, and in a few moments drew up at the platform of Barton Station. One or two passengers only got out. By this time it was nearly dark, and Patience vainly peered about in the hope of seeing someone waiting for her. An old man—grey-haired, rough-featured, clad

in stout frieze coat and leathern gaiters—came up to her, and after calmly surveying her from head to foot asked:

‘Be you for Underthwaite?’

‘Yes,’ said Patience, ‘is somebody waiting for me?’

Without answering her question the man said—
‘Come this way.’

‘But my box!’ said Patience.

‘Yer box is into the cart,’ he said, and walked on.

Patience followed. Near the station there was a covered spring-cart with a door behind. The man opened the door and signified that Patience was to enter. When she had done so, and clambered over her box to the forward end of the inside seats which faced each other, the man drew the tarpaulin hangings together at the back and climbed into his seat in front, over which the rounded cover projected. Then began the most miserable and dreary two-hours drive for poor Patience! It had become so dark that she could scarcely make out her driver’s figure against the glooming sky. Having no new sights, as hitherto, to take her out of herself, and soon becoming accustomed to the jolting of the cart and the monotonous ‘gee-whoa’ of the driver, her thoughts—in imagination—preceded her to the school at Underthwaite to where she was very slowly and wearily going. Her mother had been at this same school when she was young, and the present Head Mistress had been there—as a pupil—with her. Yet her mother had not had much to say about Miss Lemon apparently, for on Patience’s trying to recollect what she had said about her, there was

nothing to help her to form some idea of what she was like. Then she wondered what her school-fellows would be like. Hitherto she had had no girl-companions of her own age. Her big brothers had told her that 'girls were awful fools,' when she had sometimes expressed a wish to have girl-companions; but 'awful fools,' meant so many things! Patience had been 'an awful fool' when she gave her share of cake to little Mercy one day—so Jack had said: she had been 'an awful fool' the day father had beaten her with his dog-whip for breaking a window-pane (as he thought), rather than tell him that Dick had done it by flinging a stick at her when he was in a temper; and though they often called her 'an awful fool' for these and such things, Patience knew that they loved her and would each bear a thrashing in her stead (so she believed at any rate!) if an opportunity offered. So the idea of finding that the girls were 'awful fools' rather inspirited her than otherwise. She was entering the school at mid-term she also remembered; and the thought that in less than two months she would be returning to her home kept her cup of grief from brimming over.

Patience's ruminations were suddenly interrupted by the stopping of the cart, and, peering through the darkness, she saw at a little distance some lighted windows. Her driver had dismounted to open a gate, which, as the wheels crunched on a gravelly road, closed with a bang behind them. In a minute or so the horse was brought to a stand-still, and the man, opening the door of the

cart, pulled out Patience's trunk and took it up some steps to a door. There was glass at each side of the door and an arched space above it—also filled with glass. Inside hung a lamp, and its light helped Patience to follow her driver up the steps without stumbling. Arrived there, the man pulled the bell: Patience heard the sound—loud and yet distant—reverberating as through empty, but vast space. Then all was silent. The man had placed the box before the hall-door, and after a moment seated himself upon it, and, resting his elbows on his knees, put his chin between his two hands. Patience's teeth chattered with the cold, and her heart sank at the tomb-like silence of the place.

'Had you not better ring again?' at last she asked.

'Taint no use, they be at prayers,' said the man.

After what seemed an hour to Patience, a sound—doleful and dirge-like—reached her ears, rising and falling, wailing and groaning. She was tired and fanciful, and the mournful sounds filled her with fear. Seizing the man's coat she asked in a timid voice:

'What is that sound?'

'They be singing t'ymn at t'end o' prayers. They be in t'second school-room, and 'tis far off from 'ere which maks it sound loike t'wind.'

A moment afterwards, Patience, looking through one of the glass lights beside the door, saw a girl come into the hall, take up a large hand-bell, and ring it. Then a pale thin lady in a brown dress walked to the foot of the wide stone stairs which faced the hall-door, and stood

there with her hands folded. A stream of girls followed, and Patience was beginning to feel interested and to forget that she was waiting for admission when the driver again pulled the handle of the bell. Those girls who were passing on their way up-stairs turned towards the hall-door, some half-pausing with eager looks, but the lady held up an admonitory finger and said something which had the effect, apparently, of quenching the girls' curiosity, for they listlessly moved on, passing the teacher, and going up the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS LEMON.

WHEN a maid-servant had admitted Patience into the hall and had seen her trunk deposited inside the door, she bade her follow her.

Dazed by the transition from darkness to light, Patience took no note of the passages and corridors which opened upon the entrance hall. Indeed, had she done so, she would only have seen their mouths darkening into unlit gorges behind them. The maid led the way through the lightest of these passages, and, stopping at one of two doors at the end, knocked and awaited an answer. Being bid to enter, she opened the door, and, with a curtsy, said, 'The new pupil, ma'am,' and signed to Patience to enter. It was a bright and comfortable room, but prim in the extreme. Not a book lay except at right angles with its neighbour, or stood in severely straight-lined rows in the book-case. Not a scrap of paper lay athwart the writing table, but stood with envelopes, letters, account-books, note-books, and diaries in the pigeon-holes behind and above it. The brightly-polished chairs stood close to the walls—all except one luxuriously-lined and cushioned chair which was drawn up to the blazing fire, and opposite to that was

an inviting couch. A small table was laid for one person, and Patience, glancing at it, felt cheered by the seeming welcome that fact suggested. Then her glance fell on the little woman who sat in the comfortable chair, and a most uncomfortable feeling took possession of her as she looked—and continued to look. For Miss Lemon's eyes were fixed on Patience, and she seemed to be looking her through and through. What strange eyes they were! A cold, blue-grey—such as one sees on new tools in an ironmonger's shop,—with dark circles round them, and darker eyebrows and eyelashes, which helped to make the cold, steely eyes glisten like the eyes of a basilisk. The face was pale with a leaden paleness, the small bluey-white teeth glistened between the pale, parted lips—parted with a stereotyped sneer. The small gloved and mittened hands chafed each other as though they felt as cold and lifeless as her face looked. The leaden-grey hair was parted and smoothly brushed down each side of her face, turning up about the ears under her tulle cap, which was trimmed with pale mauve ribbons and chenille dots over the tulle. Her steel-grey dress fitted closely to her spare figure, and a warm knitted grey shawl hung over the arms of her chair.

Scarcely opening her teeth, she coldly asked:

'When did you leave home?'

'This afternoon,' said Patience.

'Have you been to school before?'

'No,' answered Patience.

'Look at me when you speak, child,' said Miss Lemon.

At this moment Miss Lemon's own maid brought in a

tray on which was an appetising roast chicken, some broiled ham, brocoli, and egg sauce, also some crisp potato chips. Patience had scarcely eaten a mouthful that day between grief and excitement. She noted the good supper, and, despite Miss Lemon's chilling and forbidding look, felt her heart expand with gratitude in expectation of satisfying her hunger.

'Are you hungry, child?'

'Yes,' said Patience.

'Fitz-simon, take this child and give her some supper. And Patience, remember to say "ma'am" when you answer me—"yes, ma'am," and "no, ma'am."''

'Yes, ma'am,' said Patience.

The door closed behind Fitz-simon and Patience, and Miss Lemon was left to her dainty repast.

The one bedroom candle which Fitz-simon carried only illuminated the long passages a few steps before and behind them as they went, and Patience's heart fell before they reached the dining-hall. It seemed to her bigger than Lapton Church, and far more gloomy, for there was only one small lamp hung on the wall near the door. One end of one of several long tables had a clean cloth laid upon it, and there was a plate of thick dry bread and a mug of skimmed milk waiting for Patience. She was by no means a glutton, nor even fond of her meals, but this cold bare supper laid before her just after she had seen a nice hot chicken with accessories, struck a note in her soul which had never been struck before. She lifted the mug to her lips and found that even this poor milk was watered. Her

first impulse upon this discovery was to dash the cup to the ground, but her weariness and sadness extinguished her indignant passion, and laying her head upon her arm, she burst into tears. Fitz-simon lifted a slide—one of two that opened into the kitchen—and in a minute had procured a plate of butter and a knife and proceeded to daub a small piece of butter on two of the bits of bread.

‘Here,’ she said, not unkindly, ‘I expect you are tired after your journey. Eat this bread and butter. The girls only get butter on Sunday evenings—just a dab like this in the middle of each slice. They get carraway bread with dripping and treacle in it on Thursday evenings; you will soon get used to the fare and enjoy as much as you can get. The Committee do not approve of over-feeding girls nor of giving them luxuries. It makes them too rampageous and rebellious.’

Patience, out of gratitude, tried to eat one bit of bread and butter, and while she slowly did so, Fitz-simon continued:

‘I always speak to the new girls, especially when they come in the middle of the term—but only the first day. It is one of the rules of the School that none of the pupils speak to a servant or to me. I am Miss Lemon’s maid, and live in the house-keeper’s room, and have meals with her.’

‘Are there many rules to keep?’ asked Patience.

‘Rules! It is all rules here. Lots are put up on the wall and lots are not written down, but have to be learned and kept all the same.’

'What do they do to the pupils if they break them or forget them?' asked Patience.

'Put them in silence at first, but if they go on breaking and forgetting them they are put in punishment.'

'What punishment?' asked Patience.

'Oh! generally they are locked up in "the den"—a dark room with a window so high that you cannot see through it.'

Patience shuddered.

'It is not a pleasant place I can tell you, especially in Winter, for there is no fire-place.'

Patience's eyes dilated with horror; her hand fell limp into her lap, and the piece of bread which she was lifting to her mouth fell to the floor. Fitz-simon, seeing her blanched face, laughed to try to dispel the horror which she had thoughtlessly created.

'You had better come to bed now,' she said. 'You are to sleep in the second dormitory. There are thirty girls in that room—two in a bed. Remember that you are not allowed to speak one word in the bed-rooms. You are not allowed to put anything on your bed if you feel cold, and it is cold in those rooms! But,' said Fitz-simon, sinking her voice to a whisper, 'if you are very cold put some of your clothes under the counterpane. Then they will not be seen perhaps. The Winter has almost begun, but this is nothing to what it will be soon. The basins of water for washing in freeze over thickly, and you will often have to break the ice with your fist before you can wash.'



Fitz-simon led the way to the second dormitory.

'As you have come in the middle of the term you will have a bed to yourself for the present,' she said.

It was not much more than nine o'clock, yet there was not a sound to be heard as they moved through the house—back through the dark passages, up the cold, wide, white stone stairs. The walls too were white after the hall had been left behind, and the bare boards under their feet were as white as scrubbing with soda could make them.

When the dormitory was reached this chill tone of floor and walls was maintained.

Down the middle of the room ran a white-painted wooden partition, against each side of which the heads of ten white beds rested. Between each two white-counterpaned beds hung a white dimity curtain from a white pole fixed in the wooden partition. Against the wall opposite each row of beds was a wooden ledge, on which stood a row of white washing-basins, and above and behind them hung the white towels in regular order, for woe betide any girl who did not hang her towel straight!


The struggling light of Fitz-simon's chamber-candle did not reveal all this cold whiteness to Patience, but through the grey and darkening distance the row of white curtains caught the light, and looked like ghosts amongst the shadows. Patience could see that the beds were occupied. Here a head was lifted as they passed, and there a pair of shining eyes followed them as they went, but there was no sound, no voice in this silent house.

Fitz-simon paused at an empty bed and pointed to it, then in a whisper she said, 'You must get up when the bell rings in the morning,' and setting the candle on the washing-ledge, she glided into the shadows, and Patience heard the door close upon her as she left the room.

Poor Patience! Never had she felt so dreary, so utterly alone, so frightened! The oppressive silence which seemed to pervade the place, the absence of colour and life and movement, made her feel—without knowing why—as though she were at an unlimited distance from all she loved—from her cheerful, bustling, loving mother; from her merry, teasing brothers; from little Mercy's clinging hand and caressing soft arms and fragrant kisses; even from her father's blunt reproofs—given, she was now sure, in love—for was she not his child? was he not her dear, if irascible, father? Patience's tears flowed abundantly as she remembered them all, and longed to be with them. Her little bed shook with her sobs though she was a great girl of fourteen years. Perhaps she could realise the misery of her situation better than a child of more tender years could have done. Through simple exhaustion she at last fell asleep, and dreamed that she was lost and wandering in a snowy region, trying to find her mother, but always in vain. Poor Patience!

CHAPTER XIV.

BARFIELD RECTORY.

OM never wavered in his decision to break his vow of celibacy and to woo Desirée as his wife. But though he conceded so much to his human nature, if anything he redoubled his efforts in Church work. He diligently sought out the sick and suffering and succoured them; tried hard to enlist people, young or old, in his body of helpers, making some into district visitors or nurses, some into Sunday School teachers or Church-singers.

He was more than ever eager to increase the ritual observances at Barfield church, and, being anxious to lay this important matter before Dr. Bourne, he called upon his Rector after dinner one evening.

The Rector received him kindly in the library, then patiently allowed him to lay before him the matters which exercised his mind.

Dr. Bourne was a little amused at this zealous young Churchman who was going first to reform the Church at Barfield, and was then going to demolish the sect of the most bitter opponents of the Church in that town—the Baptists. He had every confidence in himself and in his

power to achieve what he wished—two elements which tended to success, certainly.

‘So, if I understand you rightly, Genuflex,’ said Dr. Bourne, holding up one hand before him with fingers extended, and with the index finger of his right hand touching the thumb of his left as though preparing to count, ‘you want first—Daily Service or Matins and Evensong; secondly,’ touching the first finger, ‘an intoned Evensong; thirdly,’ touching the second finger, ‘that we should observe and teach our people to observe all the days of Fasting and Abstinence, and to have Service on Saints’ Days; fourthly,’ laying his index finger upon the third of his left hand, ‘that, to humour the Baptists, we should have a Baptistry, so as to be able to dip the children of Baptists who may be brought to be received by Baptism into our Church; and fifthly,’ touching his little finger (and I may, bye-the-bye, mention that it was a shapely, tapered finger, and bore a fine diamond in the ring which encircled it) ‘you would like to be allowed to teach our people “to confess” (and by consequence, I suppose, to do Penance).’ Here either Dr. Bourne’s eyes twinkled or there was in them the reflection of the ‘brilliant’ I have alluded to. ‘It might seem as though I ought to weigh your requests well before I give you my decision on each question. But in the first place, out of compassion to you—for you would scarcely sleep to-night if these matters were not at once decided’ (here the diamond-flash was again reflected in the eyes of the speaker)—‘I will give you my answers

to-night—and in few words. In the second place, this is not the first time that the advisability of having Daily Services in this and every Church has presented itself to my mind as it has to the minds of many of my brother-clergy. It is only necessary to read the directions to the Clergy at the beginning of the Prayer Book to know that all were in former days expected to hold daily Service, first ringing the bell to call their people. So convinced was I that it was right to follow these directions, that for some time after I came to Barfield I attempted to hold Matins, at least, and daily Services during Lent. But I seldom had anyone present besides the old pew-opener and, occasionally, an old lady who was really unfit to leave her house so early in the morning. Even during Lent I scarcely ever saw more than four or five people present at Matins. So I gave it up. The town has slightly increased in population since those days, and daily Services are not so rare throughout the country as they used to be: so, if you think the time which you must devote to these services could not be better employed by you, and that you are equal to being always responsible for them, you have my full consent to re-start them, and I heartily wish you success. You are also quite at liberty to make the needful arrangements with the organist and choir for intoning the Services and making them generally more musical. I have no objection to your observing Saints' Days by having a full Morning Service, and a sermon, if you are inclined to preach one. With regard to the Baptistry or Font large enough to dip into, instead of

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sprinkling, the children of Baptists and those who prefer to be dipped, I will give you a written order before you leave this house for the carpenter whom I generally employ for Church work. You can explain to him what you want.'

'With regard to the last concession—and the biggest which you require—I hope you will excuse my giving you any answer about that. It will be time enough to talk about Confession and the need of it when you have taught our people to love Church Services, and to understand the meaning of the small amount of Ritual which, at present, I approve of your introducing into our Services.'

'I am most grateful to you, sir,' said Tom, 'for being so ready to fall in with my wishes. I shall certainly sleep much more happily to-night than I have done for a long time past. Now I will wish you Good night.'

'Come up to the drawing room first to have a cup of tea with us. Mrs. Bourne would scold me if I allowed you to leave without that. These women,' smiling, 'believe in tea, I assure you.'

Dr. Bourne, without waiting for a reply, opened the door and led the way upstairs. It was the first time that Tom had been at the Rectory in the evening. Daylight was dying, but sufficient remained to light the Doctor and his guest up the stairs and through the corridor which led to the drawing room. As they drew near, sounds of girlish, chattering voices and rippling, merry laughter, intermingled with the deeper voice of a man,

penetrated his ears and made him feel rather nervous. He was not prepared for the revelation of brilliance and loveliness which dazzled him as Dr. Bourne threw open the door, saying, 'I have brought Genuflex for you to give him a cup of tea, my dear.'

It was quite too much for poor Tom—the many lamps, which, though delicately shaded, filled the room with opalescent light, the flashing of the unshaded jewel-lamps which hung beneath them, but more than all, those lovely girlish forms, white clad, and far excelling in beauty the angels whom he was accustomed to invoke, and whose form must henceforth, if unwittingly, be replaced in his imagination by the forms he was now staring at with wide-open, startled eyes. That was all he saw—the light—and the beauty which the light revealed. For full five moments he stood, motionless, then suddenly collecting his scattered ideas, which were soaring amongst saints and angels in Heaven, and realising that, though so angelic in appearance, these he gazed upon were of the earth—earthy—Tom seized his Cross, and in shame and despair at the involuntary adoration which he had offered at the throne of earthly beauty, pressed it to his lips.

Seldom could three more lovely girls be seen at the same time than those who were now met in the Lapton Rectory drawing-room.

Grace Bourne had a classical beauty of feature and form well suited to enshrine her intelligent mind. Her face was reposeful except when she spoke, then her

features and the expression of them helped to convey her meaning as well as her words.

Helen Stone, her friend, and the goddess before whom her cousin, Frank Bourne, bowed, was beautiful, though in quite a different way. Her features were delicately moulded, her skin delicately fair, and flushed most delicately with the pink you may see in a sea shell. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were so dark that, at a distance, you might exclaim, 'What glorious dark eyes!' Yet on closer inspection you would find that they were of a beautiful blue-grey. Her abundant wavy hair of a golden light brown always seemed to be surrounded by a halo of light, so insubordinate it was to ribbon or brush. Her kind heart sent smiles of joy or sympathy to her rosy lips with electric speed, disclosing a regular row of pearly teeth. She was, emphatically, an embodiment of health, beauty, happiness, and grace, and a fair sample of the highest type of English beauty.

How shall Desirée be described? Not for two moments did her mobile face wear the same expression! Did you talk of something sad? Then the corners of her mouth and eyes would droop, she would become sensibly paler as she listened. Did you relate some tale of joy? Then her face broke into dimples and smiles, her eyes danced, and scarcely could she keep her feet from moving in sympathy. Her indignation, pity, contempt, satisfaction, were all expressed as fully by her gestures and features as by her words. Her skin was clear, and her cheeks of velvety rose; her eyes almost black, soft and savage in

turns. Her features were well formed, though a little childish in style. Her mouth was most bewitching, rather full and very rosy, and with Cupid's bow distinct in the upper lip. Now her mouth pouted, now it smiled, now it pleaded, then it would seem to hiss at and spurn one, and as one met the angry flashing eyes, unbidden the thought arose that surely this beautiful form was demon-haunted.

This evening, however, she was all sweetness and sympathy. Her meeting with Tom in the afternoon and their arrangement for a walk on the following day had filled her with pleasure and triumph. She felt that she had put the chains upon her slave and that soon she should drag him at her chariot-wheel.

Mrs. Bourne greeted Tom kindly, Grace and Helen pleasantly, and Desirée with a mischievous affectation of coldness. Tom's heart and face fell. He said a few words of commonplace import, then turned to Frank Bourne. The 'young squire of Lapton,' as he was often called, though his father was living, entered into a lively discussion with his friend (they had known each other well for years), and the ladies and Dr. Bourne were in turn appealed to upon one point and another. Desirée alone was silent; yet though, for once, her tongue was still, she never for one moment ceased to compel Tom's attention and admiration. Involuntarily his eyes roved to this girl-woman who had dashed into his heart, but she seldom met his look. She would protrude a dainty foot from beneath her dress, or toy with a flower, holding her

shapely arm curved above her head, revealing its unhidden grace as the light sleeve which had covered it fell back to her shoulder. Not for an instant was she still! One moment she lay against the full silken cushion, with head half buried in its depth, but conscious that the curve of her white throat, the delicacy of her small, well-formed ear, and the fulness of her rounded hip were fully visible to Tom. Then, when she knew that he had drunk to intoxication of the cup which she so covertly held out to him, she would change her attitude, and, at last, meeting Tom's eye, would bestow one flashing smile upon him.

This by-play was quite unnoticed by the others. Grace was busy helping her mother to make tea. Frank provided their visitors with cake and bread and butter, and every glance he could spare was bestowed upon Helen Stone, who, in return, thought of no one but him.

Dr. Bourne either read the evening paper, or, dozing behind it, pretended to read it.

To say that Tom performed his devotions that night would be false. He went through them, indeed, as an irksome task, Desirée's handsome, lively face obtruding itself upon his mind's eye throughout. He was glad to find himself at last in bed, and free to let his mind wander to and remain with the enchanting vision of Desirée as he had seen her that night. 'She loves me!' he said, 'she innocently said as much. Yet can I, a poor curate, aspire to ask such loveliness, such brilliance, such grace, to be my very own—to wait, perhaps years, until I can make a home for her? She is poor, I know, and has not been

brought up in luxury as my dear mother was, and yet what a good wife and mother *she* is! Desirée will be good too. She has a loving, tender heart.'

Tom's imagination ran riot after this. He pictured a pretty country home, and himself, returning from a round of parish duties, and his being met by chubby children and a lovely and loving wife. 'Surely there is no sin in this!' he cried, 'nor in breaking a vow which I took in ignorance of the strength of my natural affections.'

Murmuring this he fell asleep, to dream of Desirée as maid, wife, mother, until at last she became the Divine Mother, and Tom, in his dream, knelt lowly and happy at her feet, adoring this Divine gift to man—Woman.

CHAPTER XV.

UNDERTHWAITE SCHOOL.

PATIENCE had many bitter trials at Underthwaite. One of the most bitter was that all letters which she received or wrote must be inspected. The second morning after she was at school, after the morning lessons were over, she and her school-fellows were, as usual, waiting to go for their daily walk. They were ranged two and two in the playground waiting until the two governesses who were going to take charge of them appeared. While they were waiting, the governess on duty gave out the letters, calling out the names of the girls to whom they were addressed. Patience watched wistfully, longing for a letter from mother.

‘Patience Genuflex,’ called out Miss Crowbourne, and Patience darted impetuously from the ranks to receive the precious missive which she joyfully took, but in an instant she said, surprised—

‘My letter is open, Miss Crowbourne!’

‘All letters are opened here,’ said the teacher gently.

‘No one has any right to open a letter from mother to me!’ said Patience indignantly.

'Patience Genuflex, if you were not a new girl I should have to give you a bad report. As it is, you must receive punishment after school this afternoon,' said Miss Crowbourne.

Patience fell into her place again, and for some minutes forgot her grievance and the apprehension of 'punishment'—whatever that might be—in her enjoyment of her mother's letter—the sweet words of love and encouragement, the pleasant references to home customs and life, the accounts of animals, plants, and people who now seemed so 'far off' to her.

Drearily the long snake-like double line of girls walked on the dreary grey road, bounded on each side, for the most part, by dreary stone walls. The dingy-coloured sheep raised their grey faces from the scanty herbage to stare at the long procession as it glided along. Patience caught sight of a gorgeous spray of bramble as she passed it. The gleaming glory of its crimson and gold foliage was such a relief to her eye that she put forth her hand and plucked the spray to carry with her as a solace as long as it might last.

'Halt!' shouted one of the governesses—Miss Pickford—in a harsh voice. Almost instinctively the feet of all those girls took the 'first position,' as during calisthenics they were in the habit of doing when a 'halt' was called as they were marching.

'Who plucked something off the wall?' said Miss Pickford.

'I did,' said Patience stepping from the ranks and holding out the gorgeous bramble-spray.

'Throw that rubbish away!'

'It isn't rubbish!' answered Patience hotly and recklessly. 'It is the most beautiful thing that I have seen since I came to this horrid, dreary school. It cannot do any harm to anyone for me to keep it. I am tired of looking at white walls and grey dresses' (for all the girls wore grey dresses). 'Why may I not keep it?' and she looked yearningly at the splendidly-coloured leaves in her hand.

'Throw that rubbish away, Patience Genuflex!' said Miss Pickford again after a slight pause and with a stern voice.

The long double file of girls stood motionless, but for the numerous eyes which glanced from Miss Pickford to the refractory girl.

Patience stood still, her eyes fixed upon her treasure.

Miss Pickford waited.

At length, Patience, feeling that the governess was determined to be obeyed, lifted her arm and flung the gorgeous bramble over the stone wall.

'Now walk alone behind the other girls,' said Miss Pickford, 'and remember that you are in disgrace for the day.'

The governesses at Underthwaite were a strange mixture of characters. Some had been there for years before the oldest girl in the school had gone there (and she had been sent to school when she was six years old,

and was now seventeen years of age!). These fixtures, as we may call them, were Miss Lemon, the head-mistress, who, as we have incidentally mentioned, had also been a pupil at the school when she was young—at the same time that Patience's mother had been there; Miss Pickford, the second English teacher; her sister, Miss Mary Pickford; and Miss Threlton, who had also, at some former time, been a pupil at Underthwaite, and who was now the third English mistress.

Miss Pickford was spare in figure, precise in movement and conduct, severe in carrying out discipline and in visiting every infringement of rules with punishment. She inspired the girls with fear and dislike, for she never smiled, though she never looked sad. Her sister, Miss Mary, was the junior music-mistress (though in years much older than the other ladies who taught music and singing). She was of a kind, timid nature, and—when-ever her sister was not present—had a smile upon her face. She taught the younger girls, with whom she was gentle and painstaking. She was rather inclined to be stout, and was fond of her meals. She and her sister always dressed alike, generally in browns or slatey tints, and, of course, in accordance with the elder woman's tastes. Miss Pickford had never been known to do such a frivolous thing as to wear a bright ribbon or a flower, but Miss Mary hankered after bright colours, and often ventured to put a cherry-coloured, or golden, or sky-blue ribbon at her throat, or in her sober, plain bonnet. On these occasions her sister would talk to her with a

sarcastic voice and with a freezing expression of countenance, but years of such protest as this had not succeeded in bending Miss Mary's will to hers in this one respect. That fugitive bit of colour worn by Miss Mary kept her heart alive!

Miss Threlton was the third English mistress. She had been a clever girl when she was a pupil at the school—some eight or ten years previously—and, as she was proficient in arithmetic and mathematics generally, had been retained as a teacher when her school course was run. She was of medium height, dark-haired, pale-faced. Her thick black eyebrows surmounted a pair of deep-set piercing grey eyes. Their peculiar expression of cold penetration was intensified by the steel-rimmed tinted glasses which she wore. Her firm mouth was rendered stern-looking by an almost masculine moustache which overshadowed it. Of a truth, Miss Threlton *was* grave and stern, but just and inquisitorial, never punishing without sifting and weighing every charge of irregularity and wrong-doing amongst her pupils.

There was one more fixture—Miss Crowbourne. She had been for four years or more at Underthwaite, though she must have found it a most uncongenial sphere of work. Miss Crowbourne was one of the junior mistresses, and her duties were varied, for she taught music and English subjects, calisthenics, sewing, and drawing. She was tall, fair, pale, with transparent golden hair, and soft, kind, often merry, brown eyes. She was perhaps the most popular of the governesses, always ready to

talk with the girls and sympathise with them. Each mistress took turns in taking charge of the two large schoolrooms, and 'Miss Crowbourne's day' was looked forward to and enjoyed more than any other. If it fell on a half-holiday she generally had a crowd of girls gathered round her table with their books and needle-work, and to one and another she would talk in turns, or would give a kind look or smile until the hearts of her admiring and devoted young friends would recover some of the warmth and elasticity which the weary routine of school-work—accompanied by cold or stern looks and harsh speeches from other mistresses—had almost crushed out of them.

Miss Lemon seldom visited the schoolrooms except to conduct the long morning and evening prayers, but when, by chance, she was showing a visitor over the school one day, and found an assembly of girls, as usual, round Miss Crowbourne's table, she darted a contemptuous look at them as she passed, and on reaching the door—her pallid face wreathed in cold smiles as she talked to the visitor (who thought her an angelic woman)—she suddenly stepped back to Miss Crowbourne, and, in an icy voice, accompanied with a piercing look, hissed out from between her clenched teeth—

'Disperse those girls!' then turned—smiling and affable—to continue her remarks to the visitor.

Miss Curdon, the new singing mistress, was young, good-looking, and romantic. She had a grand voice and was a first-class trainer of the human voice. Naturally

of a joyous disposition, she felt outside of her own element at Underthwaite. Repression seemed to be the order of the day there. Silence prevailed throughout those long corridors, for no word was allowed to be spoken in the passages. Silence prevailed in those cold white dormitories, for 'no speaking' was allowed in the bed-rooms. Silence prevailed in the dining-hall, for 'no English' was 'to be spoken during meals,' and if a girl wanted salt, or bread, or potatoes, she must ask for it in French or German; and if she made a fault in pronunciation, accent, or grammar, she would be detained for half-an-hour in recreation-time to study her French grammar as a punishment for presuming to speak French without knowing how to do so.

Such severity towards the girls struck a chill into Miss Curdon's warm nature, and she mentally resolved that her stay at Underthwaite should be of short continuance.

Miss Smith, the head music-mistress, was tall, plump, fair, and, in the opinion of the generality of the girls, exquisitely pretty with her golden ringlets, baby-blue eyes, shell-pink cheeks, and transparent complexion. She was merry, but unemotional. She was unmoved in the presence of Miss Lemon, treating her with due respect, but never forgetting her own dignity. She had been at Underthwaite for two years. Being undemonstrative, she had not inspired as much affection in the girls' hearts as the sympathetic Miss Crowbourne had, but they felt easy in her presence and unrestrained in their conversation and amusements.

Miss Brainton, the new head English teacher, was a small, pale, quiet, self-possessed woman. She took the utmost and most conscientious pains to teach her pupils, and had a reputation amongst the girls of being 'tremendously clever.' Some said that she 'wrote books.' She was generally liked except by those indolent girls who did not prepare their work as well as Miss Brainton expected. She succeeded in interesting her pupils in the subjects which she taught, and, to encourage them, she rewarded the most diligent by taking them for a walk on half-holidays—an indulgence which no other teachers had ever been able to wring out of Miss Lemon for their pupils. During these walks Miss Brainton was chatty and pleasant, and entered fully into the interests of her young companions, and always seemed to remember everything which they told her, alluding pleasantly to the 'sick brother,' the 'pet dog,' the 'brother at Cambridge,' when she subsequently saw her young friends.

Fraulein Kirch was a sealed book to most of the girls. She was tall, fair, with pale eyes, pale hair, eye-lashes, and eye-brows. She looked quiet and not over-happy, spoke English very indifferently, and got an indifferent salary for teaching her own tongue which she used whenever she had occasion to speak to the girls—to their mystification or amusement, as the case might be.


Mademoiselle Delaine was a lively old French woman with glossy dark-grey hair, bright blue wide-open eyes, arched brows, arched nose, and round shiny forehead.

Her cheeks were rosy and her chin double, and she generally wore a black silk velvet, tight-fitting bodice, a shot-silk skirt with many flounces, and the most exquisite *guipure* collars and cuffs, embroidered by her own hands. In fact, Mademoiselle was never seen without a piece of embroidery in her hands out of school-hours, so perhaps she eked out a small salary by using her deft fingers. She spoke English volubly—in her way—only relapsing into French if her quick temper was roused—as it sometimes was—by a mischievous girl who enjoyed a little variety of scene. Mademoiselle could look terribly severe, but she generally looked *rayonnante*.

This was the staff of teachers at Underthwaite.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS LEMON'S 'FAMILIAR.'

 HERE was also a chaplain—the Rev. Henry Sheepshanks. His duties were to deliver a weekly lecture or sermon during prayer time on Wednesday evenings; to prepare and approve of the candidates for Confirmation; and to exhort, examine, and pray with any girls who were refractory or had been guilty of grave faults. Mr. Sheepshanks had a brown face, blue, anxious eyes, and a high, bald forehead, though he was by no means old. He was confidently looking forward to the Millennium, was strong on ‘conviction of sin,’ hated the Scarlet Woman and all her Abominations. With an awful voice he would descant on the terrors of hell and the jeopardy of unrepentant souls, and week after week he would urge his hearers to ‘prepare for death,’ as though that was the chief duty for which they had been born. On Sundays his sermon always lasted for an hour each, and woe betide any unlucky girl who, cajoled by the droning of a humble-bee on some hot Sunday afternoon, should drop off to sleep during the sermon. That anxious eye would find her even in that crowded gallery—for the seats rose up one [H]

above another. The next Wednesday that sepulchral voice would warn her of the punishment of the rebellious—or of backsliders, if the offender were a professing Christian. Her conscience would be prodded and probed as to whether she felt repentant for that special delinquency and for her general unregenerate state. So great was Mr. Sheepshanks' influence—a most discomfiting one—over the girls, that they in their terror lay bare their hearts and minds to him. Together they anxiously analysed their composition in order to discover the 'besetting sin.' Everyone had a 'besetting sin,' the chaplain preached and taught and reiterated and insisted upon; and it behoved everyone to find out—each one for herself—her 'besetting sin.' Was it lying? Let her guard the door of her lips and count ten before she spoke when she was tempted to deviate ever so little from the pathway of truth. Was it gluttony? Let her resist the wicked cravings of her stomach, and be sure to desist from eating at her meals while she was still longing for more food. Was it angry passions? Let her make a friend of the most uncongenial and disagreeable companion who had roused her anger. Was it romantic castle-building? a dreaming of a '*preux chevalier*,' whose strong, but tender arm should come between the world and her? Away with such unmaidenly thoughts!—snares of Satan to drag her into the bottomless pit!

So it happened that all but the most unregenerate of these girls walked about with sad or frightened faces. They had discovered their 'besetting sin.' Mr. Sheep-

shanks knew it; it had been his duty to acquaint Miss Lemon with it. Her memory was good, and she lost no opportunity of reminding each girl of her 'besetting sin.'

'When you have *quite* done eating,' she would observe to one girl whose 'besetting sin' was gluttony, 'I will say grace;' and her tone was cutting, and a mocking, satirical smile flitted over her leaden face. Every eye would be turned upon that poor shame-faced girl—some in pity, some in righteous indignation. Quivering with pain and shame she would replace upon the platter the piece of dry bread with which she might have satisfied the gnawing hunger which was but half appeased.

One girl, who was of an imaginative turn of mind, and allowed her fancy some little rein when she related an anecdote or tale, had confessed this 'besetting sin' to Mr. Sheepshanks.

'Did you prepare your history last night?' asked Miss Lemon of this girl one day.

'Yes, ma'am,' answered the girl, blushing from nervousness.

'Ah! it is a sad thing to have a reputation for untruthfulness,' said Miss Lemon sneering, 'but, "be sure your sin will find you out." Your guilty looks betray you.'

'Indeed,' began the girl, almost indignantly; but Miss Lemon cut her short with—

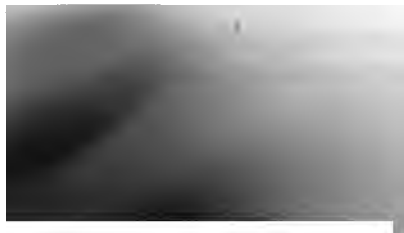
'Silence! one lie begets another. If you tell one you tell a dozen to cover that one. I am ashamed of you,' and, feeling that all present condemned and despised her, the timid and innocent girl shrank into herself, and from

that day it was whispered among the girls, 'Mary Lamb is untruthful,' and none dared to be seen in her company for fear of being branded as she was—though unjustly.

Patience Genuflex had not been more than a week at Underthwaite before she was ranked by her teachers and schoolfellows as the most rebellious and refractory girl in the school; by Mr. Sheepshanks as the most 'unregenerate' of his flock.

'But we will tame her!' hissed Miss Lemon to the chaplain as—seated in her cosy room near a crackling fire—they discussed a dainty little supper of fricasseed sweetbreads garnished with slices of lemon.

'We will pluck her as a brand from the burning,' replied he, and swallowed a glass of Chablis before he renewed his attack on the sweetbreads.



CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE AND VANITY.

DESIRÉE started for her walk with her sails of vanity puffed out by the heartily out-spoken eulogies of her school-fellows.

She was most popular with them, for her fun enlivened them, her beauty dazzled them, and her skill in millinery and in creating bewitching trifles out of next to nothing made her a desirable companion to any who had the desire to enhance their natural charms.

'Desirée Meudon,' called out a girl who affected boyishness in appearance and speech, 'you look stunning!'

'Ah! does that signify that I appear in a charming manner?' replied Desirée.

'Your hat is lovely, Desirée!' said another, 'and becomes you exactly.'

'But I know you do not intend to say that my hat will be myself! No, no, the hat goes well, is it not? with the *bonne grâce*?' and Desirée smiled bewitchingly and pirouetted on one foot.

'You do look so nice!' said another.

'Nice, nice,' repeated Desirée doubtfully, 'you say that

one cake of raisins of Corinth is nice. Me, I cannot be nice like that. No, but I know !' she added, nodding her head approvingly, 'Desirée *is* nice—refined, delicate ! But it is necessary that I am nice, for I did sit down till very advanced time this morning to construct this so ravishing habit.'

'It is lovely !' exclaimed several voices.

Desirée nodded gaily, then kissing her hand to them she ran down the walk amidst loud expressions of approval mingled with good-natured laughter.

The French girl loved admiration and was never ashamed to show her pleasure at receiving compliments. Her face was still beaming with smiles and flushed with excitement when, a few minutes later, she met Tom Genuflex. His looks betrayed his unfeigned admiration.

'Good morning, Mademoiselle,' he said, 'you look well and in good spirits, so I need not make any inquiries about you.'

'But I am certainly well, Mr. Genuflex,' replied Desirée, 'and to make this walk with you renders me happy.'

Tom turned and walked by her side. They chatted without ceasing, chiefly because Desirée cunningly asked questions upon subjects which she knew would interest Tom.

One of Desirée's school-fellows—Mary Dart—had taken the place of governess at Lapton Vicarage, where Tom's parents lived. Mrs. Genuflex found that when Patience went to school, and many of her duties fell to

her mother, her hands were too full, and so, with Frank Bourne's aid, she arranged that one of the girls at the Barfield High-School should come and help her by teaching the children. Desirée asked many questions of Tom as to how Mary Dart got on at Lapton, and inquired much about his mother, of whom she saw that he was very fond, and also about his young brothers and sisters. Tom waxed eloquent as he spoke of his tiny sister Mercy and told of the escapades of which his young brothers were sometimes guilty.

Desirée was much amused at these stories, and frequently indulged in merry laughter. Tom enjoyed seeing her amused, so that he multiplied his stories to please her and himself.

At length Desirée jumped down from the gate upon which she had been sitting during the latter part of these recitals, looking down into Tom's face as he talked. What a handsome face she found it now that it was animated! Generally it was pale and calm 'like a statue,' she thought. When he stood at the lectern or in the prayer-desk how calm and cold he looked! But to-day!—'Qu'il est beau! qu'il a bonne grâce!' she mentally ejaculated. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes shone with pleasure as she looked at him.

He, who noted her every look, saw that she was much moved: her eyes seemed to chain his looks to hers.

'What is it, Desirée?' he asked tenderly and his voice vibrating; 'what are you thinking about?'

'I think of you!' she said quietly but becoming more

agitated as she spoke. 'You do not always appear like this! When you kneel to "*le bon Dieu*," or even to the crucified Jesus, you love them I know, but your eyes are cold, your face is tranquil, they feel so far removed from you, is it not? But to-day,' continued Desirée, 'one poor little girl is near to you, you touch her hand, you look far, far into her eyes, you go to hear her poor little heart flutter, and then your eyes throw out the fire, your pulses palpitate, you come so close that your breath warms her cheek. What will you then, Mr. Genuflex?' cried the girl passionately.

Tom Genuflex did not take his eyes off the girl's face once while she spoke. When she asked him this question he gently took her two hands in his own and pressed them against his beating heart. After a moment he spoke—

'What do I want, Desirée? What do all men want, but the love of a good woman? That alone can make a man strong to fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil.'

He looked, as well as he could, into the half-hidden flushed face, and, seeing no displeasure, he lifted the two little hands to his lips and kissed them ardently and repeatedly. Desirée's pouting lips caught his eye. His heart was aflame, and he passed one arm round her dainty waist, while with the other he drew her head upwards and pressed his lips, quivering with strong emotion, upon her rosy mouth. She did not shrink from his caresses; with half-closed eyes and hurried,

fitful breathings she yielded herself to them in all their ardour. At length Tom spoke:

‘I love you, Desirée, and you love me. Tell me so. Do you love me?’

Desirée extricated herself from his masterful arms and stood smiling and happy before him.

‘Ah! but yes, I love you, Mr. Genuflex, and you? you truly love me, do you not?’

‘Better than anyone in the world, Desirée. We will always love each other, even when we are very old. Some day you will be my wife and we will be always together:’ and Tom drew Desirée’s hand within his arm and they continued their walk, he in the seventh heaven of happiness, she—well, she was only a gay, giddy, pleasure-loving, French girl. She had brought Tom figuratively to her feet, she admired him, for the time being she loved him, she enjoyed his kisses and his earnest love-making, but to marry him! marry Tom Genuflex—a poor curate, a true religious, too, she! Desirée! who loved pretty clothes and longed for gaiety and excitement in the mad whirl of the world of fashion which she had only read about. She!—marry Tom Genuflex!—never! She looked sweetly and shyly up at Tom as, in a few words, he outlined their future life together, nodding her head smilingly or laughing softly. Once more before they parted their lips met, and when, at the High School gate, she tripped lightly up the drive, he gave voice to a happy thought—

‘This is Heaven on Earth!’

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. HOLDEN'S WIDOWS AND THEIR GOSSIP.

MRS. Caile and Mrs. Bennett were seated in the comfortable parlour of the former 'lady's' house discussing the latest events at Barfield over 'a cup of tea.'

'Mrs. Bourne and Miss Grace have been in to see me two or three times quite friendly since they heard I had the rheumatis', and they talk so nice and humble. They told me that the curate had asked them to come and enquire after me, which was very civil of Mr. Genuflex, and I told them I was grateful to him. So one day if the curate himself didn't knock at my door! I was that taken aback when I opened the door that I nearly dropped! He smiled very kind and said he was afraid that he had started me. We had quite a pleasant talk, and he drank a cup of tea with me, and said he had been pleased to see me at church one evening. He thanked me hearty for attending "the mission sewing-party."'

'Yes, he do talk pleasant-like, and he isn't bad when you come to know him. I gave him a subscription for coal and blankets for the poor, and I must say he looks after our people as well as the church-people, and a deal

better than some I could name, and who teases us often for money "for the poor,"" said Mrs. Caile with a sneer and brushing the crumbs from her ample lap.

The two women drew up to the fire, and, putting their feet on the fender, continued their chat.

'The chapel is going down fast,' said Mrs. Bennett; 'one after another is leaving, and members, too!'

'That's the worst of it,' said Mrs. Caile, 'Holden wouldn't mind if 'twas such poor bodies as Mrs. Lane that joined the Church, but 'tis the well-to-do folk as is leaving us; and indeed it felt comfortless there last Sunday, there were so few, and I have just a mind to go oftener to church myself.'

'Will you come next Sunday, Mrs. Caile?' said her friend, rather timorously.

'I don't mind if I do,' answered she, 'it is nice and warm there, and full at any rate. The music's very pretty and the flowers; and indeed the boys all in white are very pretty too: they look like angels and make one think of them, though perhaps they are mostly young devils.'

'They behave themselves there at any rate,' said Mrs. Bennett, 'and they do sing pretty. 'Tis the singing what do draw our people to church as much as the curate's preaching, though he do preach well, I must say!'

'So simple too!' said Mrs. Caile. 'He shows us all our duty plain and easy like, though I do not hold with Fasting as he calls it. Dr. Bourne preached nice about Fasting and Penance and Confession and such Popish doctrines

the last time I was at church. He plainly told us that though many good people in the church believed in such things and practised them, that he, for one, would never ask anyone to use such ways that did not like them; that some thought one way and some thought the other, and that there were good people of both ways of thinking, but that we might be good church-people and good Christians if we only believed in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. That's fair enough, say I.'

'Ay, and the teaching is all plain in church, and the poor people are well looked after, and we are not bullied—no, nor flattered either—for our money.'

'Like enough you and me'll be soon going to church altogether, Mrs. Bennett, and like enough Mr. Holden'll be "shutting up shop" when a few more of his "members" leave him. There are strange stories flying about him. Did you hear about the empty bottles, Mrs. Bennett?' said Mrs. Caile lowering her voice.

'No, I didn't,' said that person, looking eager and craning her neck towards Mrs. Caile in readiness for an interesting confidence.

'Well, you know what a temperance-man he is?'

Mrs. Bennett nodded assent.

'According to him he never touches a drop of anything stronger than tea except "for his stomach's sake;" and by the way my brandy-bottle gets to the bottom, he must have a great regard for his "stomach."'

Both women giggled; then Mrs. Caile went on:

'Well, I was talking to Sarah Jane, his new servant,

one night as I passed Mr. Holden's door, and she was standing at it for a breath of fresh air.'

'“Is your master in, Sarah Jane?” says I.'

'“No, ma'am,” says Sarah Jane, “he is gone down street to the Traveller's Rest. I saw him turn in.”'

'“Oh! to try to cure some of the old toppers, I suppose,” I said.'

'“He must cure himself first then,” says Sarah Jane.'

'“What do you mean, Sarah Jane?” says I, though I was not a bit started, for I suspected afore.'

'“Well,” said Sarah Jane, “Mr. Holden says that it is a sin to drink anything strong, but laws! the bottles and bottles I saw in his cupboard one day when he left his keys hanging in the cupboard by forgetfulness, and I peeped in just to see what he always wanted to lock that special cupboard for! Most of the bottles was empty, certainly, but who had drank them? Mrs. Caile, that's what I ask—who had drank them?”'

'“You don't mean it, Sarah Jane!” says I, shocked.'

'“Indeed, ma'am, and I do; and two days after he asked me to carry a hamper down to the Traveller's Rest. 'Twa'nt very heavy, though he said 'twas some books he'd promised to Mr. Drew, the landlord. I knocked at the door, and says I to Mr. Drew—‘Here's the books Mr. Holden promised you, sir.’ He looked comical for a minute and then said: ‘Thank you, my gel, put the books down here,’ pointing to the cellar steps, and I thought it a strange place to put books too. But one day after that the keys were left overnight in

the cupboard again, and I peeped in just thoughtlessly, and—what d'you think? all the empty bottles was gone, but there was a full one and a half left; and I put this and that together, and says I to myself—'Them books was empty bottles and no mistake.' So much for Mr. Holden's temperance!" and she snapped her fingers and laughed. Then she told me that she was not going to darken the door of the chapel again if she lost her place—which was a good enough one—for it.'

'You take away my breath!' said Mrs. Bennett. 'What a hypocritical man that Holden must be! Laws! I do not feel like going to chapel after that!'

'Nor I,' said Mrs. Caile; 'anyhow, we will go to church next Sunday.'

To church they did go too, and the oftener they went the better the service suited them. They soon found that many of their co-members at chapel attended church regularly, which helped to make them more at home. Hitherto they had been flattered into believing that they were good Christians, but under Dr. Bourne's and Mr. Genuflex's teaching they began to see and to feel that at the best they were 'miserable sinners,' and at the same time they felt a lively desire to become better, which desire bore fruit in regular attendance at the church services, and a hearty co-operation with the clergy in all works set on foot for the good of the people, the help of the poor and sick, and the improvement of the fabric and services of the church.

CHAPTER XIX.

RECKLESS PATIENCE.

THE Christmas holidays came at last, and the school at Underthwaite broke up for one month. Patience had been in a feverish state of excitement for the last week, longing to escape from her dreadful prison. In her joyous anticipations of seeing her beloved home and all her dear ones—including her father—her conduct had become—to say the least of it—random. Miss Lemon called it reckless. She broke rule after rule, to the horror of the more disciplined pupils. She spoke loudly in English at meals, was twice reported for speaking to servants—one of them being the old gardener—Fielding. This poor old man was never known to speak to a pupil before, but Patience led him astray. He was brown-faced, and his clothes and hair and hands were brown, perhaps in consequence of his for ever bending over the flower beds—large and small—in the great garden which lay in front of the school. There was a terrace in front of the house, and beneath that a big lawn with many beds near the outer margin. Round that lawn there was a broad walk on which the girls were allowed to walk daily, and beyond the walk was a belt of

shrubs with a border of flowers in front. Fielding never seemed to see the girls, but worked on without lifting his eyes from his beds and flowers. One clear winter day, however, just three days before the holidays, Patience noticed him treading carefully in one spot and another all over the beds.

'What are you doing, Fielding?' she asked.

No answer came.

'Why are you treading round those plants?' she asked again.

The old man turned his head to look at his questioner without unbending his poor old back. Seeing that she was intently watching him, a tender string was touched in his heart, and in a hushed voice he answered:

'T' frost ha lifted ma foine 'richuses and p'imroses and pollycanthuses and 'paticas, and I am pressing tum doon fear t' frost 'll kill um.'

'When will the flowers come on them, Fielding? I do love flowers!' said Patience.

''Bout March and April these 'll all flower, but t' ac-onites and Christmas roses and snowdrops 'll be here long afore them.' The old man's eyes sparkled as he recalled his favourites. 'And t' hepaticas and t' glory of t' snow and t' Christmas roses 'll be here soon too.'

'Patience Genuflex,' said Miss Threlton's voice, 'I must report you for disobedience.' Patience shrugged her shoulders and smiled. Miss Threlton looked sternly at her through her tinted glasses, and said:

'And also for insolent demeanour. Follow me.'

Hot words rose to Patience's lips, but she wisely forbore to utter them. Miss Threlton led the way to the house through the wide hall, then up stairs and through passages and corridors, until she stopped before a door with a key in the lock. She pushed the door open and said severely:

'Patience Genuflex, you are becoming hardened in wickedness. You will stay in this room until bed-time. Pray spend a part of this time in self-examination and repentance.'

Patience curiously descended two steps, but before the key had finished turning in the lock, and before she had time to look round, it flashed upon her that this was 'the den'—the terrible den of which she had heard so much. Yes, there was the little window, too high for anyone to look through. There was the narrow bed with straw pailliasse and coarse scanty coverings. There was the solitary stool upon which she would sit for the next six or eight hours. For a minute she felt dismayed, crushed. Then the thought that in two more days she would be going home reanimated her spirit. She resolved to pass the time by thinking of her dear ones and by making plans for the holidays. She heard the first and second dinner-bells ring, and wondered whether any food would be brought to her.

'It is only that horrid boiled rice and "resurrection-pie" to-day,' she said to herself, 'so it will not be much loss if they leave me without dinner.' By and by she heard the first and second bells ring for afternoon school, and the bells to change classes twice after that. Those bells broke

the dreary silence and relieved the tedium of that long afternoon for Patience. Never had she liked the sound of the school-bell before. By and by the bells rang for tea, then for 'preparation,' and as she was nearly dozing off to sleep on the hard bed she heard the bell ring for prayers. It had long been dark, but fortunately there was a bright moon, so that the room was not pitch dark, though no rays of moonlight found their way directly into that melancholy place. Patience had found her imprisonment less irksome than it might have been, owing to her happy thoughts of home. At one time she had felt hungry, but the feeling had worn off, and she was now peacefully waiting to be released. At last Miss Threlton opened the door and told Patience to follow her. This time she led her to Miss Lemon's door, and, telling her that Miss Lemon expected her, she bid her knock. Patience did so, and was ordered to 'come in.' On entering, she found Mr. Sheepshanks seated on the sofa on one side of a brilliant fire, opposite to Miss Lemon, who occupied her usual arm-chair.

'Well, Patience Genuflex, what have you to say for yourself,' said Miss Lemon, sharply.

'I am very cold and have had no food since the morning,' replied Patience, sturdily.

'We know all that,' said Miss Lemon, 'but I want to know what made you so insolent to Miss Threlton ?

Patience kept silence.

Then Mr. Sheepshanks spoke in a sepulchral voice:

'It is only of the poor body you think, not of your

precious soul. Cold and hungry, forsooth! What matters it for the body? What about your soul? You have the means of grace all round you, but your soul is starving, refusing to eat the spiritual food which is provided for it. Your soul is cold for want of religious fervour. The "living waters" are offered to you, but you will not drink; manna from Heaven is held out to you, but you will not eat. Fear not for your poor body, but fear Him, who, when He hath killed the body, hath power to cast your soul into Hell!

He held out his arm and pointed at Patience with his long fore-finger, and as his tall, slender form rose above her, and his deep, hollow voice sounded in her ears, she uttered a stifled scream.

'Patience Genuflex, you are a wicked girl!' said Miss Lemon. 'Take care that the Lord does not cut you off with all your wickedness unrepented of. I have had a letter from your father, and he says that, as you have so recently come to school, it will be better for you to spend the vacation here than to go home and become unsettled. Now go to bed, and let me warn you not to fall under my displeasure again!'

To say that Patience felt crushed when Miss Lemon announced to her that she was to spend the holidays at Underthwaite School would not be true. Happier would it have been for her if she had felt crushed, for she would have been spared much suffering. Her whole being was filled with indignation; disappointment and sorrow keeping, at first, quite in the background. Had her own

father ordered this bitter trial for her? Could she live—even for a few days longer—in this dreadful prison, this hell upon earth where it seemed sinful to be happy, sinful to love anyone or anything; where, for three-fourths of her time, she was obliged to be silent? Only the thought of going home so soon had made her life at Underthwaite endurable, and now—she must spend the holidays there, perhaps alone, or worse, with Miss Lemon in the house, who would torment her with fault-findings; freeze her with that terrible icy, sarcastic smile, and all the time enjoy her misery. Patience's blood boiled with rage; her mind framed the maddest plans of escape; her heart was filled with loathing of the place and with hatred of Miss Lemon and the elder Miss Pickford and Mr. Sheepshanks. Far into the night she lay awake in a most excited state, rebellious and desperate, until the thought of her mother's disappointment touched a soft cord in her heart, and her rage was extinguished in a flood of sorrowful, passionate weeping. It was far into the small hours when—exhausted with rage and grief—she at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER XX.

DISENCHANTMENT !

NO sooner had Desirée reached her home at the High School after her walk and love-making with Tom, than the incident presented itself to her mind with its high lights at their highest, and its shadows at their deepest pitches.

‘What have I gone for to do?’ she asked herself with some anxiety. ‘Me, I must meditate upon all of this.’

Just then there was a knock at the door. Desirée jumped up and opened it. A maid had come to see if she had returned from her walk.

‘Yes, I am here,’ said Desirée, ‘please convey to Miss Parker the intelligence that I suffer from one very bad headache, and that Mademoiselle Meudon finds it impossible to descend to the supper. But, Lizzie,’ she added confidentially to the girl, ‘you will bring me something nice up here, will you not? and pray do not inform Miss Parker that I am so well as to eat.’

Desirée accompanied her request with a bewitching smile, and Lizzie cheerfully promised to do as she was asked—and fulfilled her promise.

Then Desirée sat down to think.

'Mr. Genuflex has a great passion for me. For me he would, perhaps, forget even his religion. He would marry me, and for each little one that was born to us we should put less butter on our bread, and at last there would come no butter at all, and perhaps, no bread as well.'

Desirée shrugged her shoulders and then shivered, then went on thinking—

'The love is very good, and Mr. Genuflex is a beautiful man with—oh! such grand eyes with the fire in them! I love his kisses too, and to feel his arms tight round me. It amuses me, and I feel desolate to remember that so strong love will break his heart if I will not put my heart in his, poor man! in truth he loves me. I know it long. I made him to love me. It was amusing!'—here Desirée smiled and flushed—'but I have fear that it is wicked and cruel,' here she grew grave and her cheek paled.

'It would not suit,' she continued, 'for me to marry one poor man! I must have money—enough of money when I come to marry. If I cannot acquire the money and an elegant, strong man, I will find some plain fool—young or old—even the Devil if it must be—with money, money for pleasure, money for dress, money that I may dazzle the eyes of many men with my *chic* beauty, my lively manners. Ah! I know I can!'

At this point Desirée's excited thoughts made it necessary for her to accompany the movements of her mind with corresponding motions of the body. She

jumped up, danced a few paces, waving her arms gracefully above her head, then paused before the mirror on her dressing-table.

'Oh! but I am so beautiful!' she cried, smiling at her own reflection. 'No wonder that Mr. Genuflex loves me; it would surprise me if he did not, for I have smiled on him, my eyes have drawn the soul out of him. They shall do the same work again on other men until that I find the good *parti* with abundance of money. But I would not that Mr. Genuflex should tell persons that he is going for to marry me. No! It is necessary that I shall send him a letter to stop that!'

Desirée sat down, and after, for a few moments, pressing her penholder to her lips, wrote the following note:—

Dear Mr. Genuflex,

I did in truth love you when we walked this afternoon and when you kissed me and announced that you loved me. It is very good of you to love one poor lonely girl without one pound of money. But we two are poor: let it now end for ever! I will never marry without abundance of moneys. Love is very good: love alone, perhaps, would make you happy: but not me! I must have moneys to be happy—moneys with love if it is that I can find it, but moneys alone if love will not come with it.

Forget this afternoon and me quite soon.

Your sincere friend,

Rev. T. Genuflex.

DESIRÉE MEUDON.

When Lizzie brought up Desirée's supper the latter made her promise to run to the curate's lodgings with her note that very hour.

'He might write to someone to-night or tell it to Dr. Bourne or his nephew,' thought Desirée.

When Tom came in from a boys' Confirmation-class late that evening his landlady gave him a little pink, scented note. He knew at a glance that it was from Desirée, and bounded up stairs three steps at a time, locking the door when he reached his room, so as to enjoy the note and its contents without interruption.

Seated in his easiest chair he kissed the note before opening it, then he read it.

Gradually his beaming face clouded over—the light in his eyes was quenched, his lightly-flushed cheeks became blanched, his smiling lips closed, then became compressed; he sat up rigid and ghastly, his chest heaving, his breath laboured.

'Has Desirée written this? Can she mean it?'

Only just now, it seemed, he held her to his heart, pressed her willing lips, looked through her eyes into her heart, and felt that they were united in love as he hoped they some day would be in wedlock. In his deep love for her he had been too willing to believe that she was all that was good as well as all that is fair to the eye.

'Oh! Desirée!' he cried in anguish at last, 'your own hands have torn the veil from my eyes! you are a woman—a beautiful woman, but good?—No! you compel my love and then you trample it under foot, and confess that you intend to lure others on the same rocks against which my poor heart has been dashed.'

Long he sat and battled with his love. Now he was

tender and forgiving, and dreamed of winning Desirée's love back to him; then he was angry, and tried to strangle each tender feeling for her who would trifle with his pure, strong love for her: then he was filled with disgust at a woman who could, within a few hours, abandon herself to his caresses, and then calmly tell him to 'end all this for ever !' and at the same time announce her intention to secure another partner for life provided with that indispensable necessary to pleasure and enjoyment of this world's goods—money.

When he rose to his feet all joy was gone out of his face, his eyes were dull, his lips drooped, his form was bent as though by a heavy load. Mechanically he walked into his bedroom and bent the knee before the Crucifix. Long he knelt, no words on his lips or in his heart. He simply knelt there before the Crucified Man of Sorrows, crushed by his heavy burden, knowing of no other refuge in his misery. By and by he lifted his eyes to that suffering Figure with the beautiful bent Head. In it he saw Suffering embodied—Suffering infinite, undeserved. That thought and feeling arrested his attention. 'Smitten with grief Thou wert,' he cried, 'the sins and sorrows of all the countless generations of a whole world lay on Thy Head and on Thy Heart. Yes, even my sorrows Thou has borne.'

Surely Tom Genuflex's load was lightened as, after long kneeling, he rose to his feet. His face was pale, but calm. Lines of suffering there were on it, but also of determination and of high resolve. Erect he stood as,

forgetful of self, he determined that, for the future, Christ and His Church should have all his heart, thanking God for the sweet fruit of love which he had tasted, even though it had turned to bitterness in his mouth, for it would help him to understand and to help to bear the trials of like kind with his which others had to endure.

When Desirée next met Tom she was piqued to see how calmly he met her. So cool and indifferent he seemed that she began to imagine that his feeling for her had only been a passing fancy. His scrupulous politeness and absence of resentment annoyed her. She had intended to avoid him, instinctively feeling that she had behaved badly to him. Now she was again fired with the desire of conquest, so dear to her, and very warily laid her webs to try once more to entangle Tom.

He was, however, proof against her every artifice. He did not avoid her; he did not make the slightest difference in his treatment of and manner to her to the way in which he treated other girls and women. As he felt a great pity for any careless or wicked person, so he felt it for this beautiful but heartless girl who had had the power to stir his nature and heart so deeply.

Desirée tried in vain to recover her lost power over Tom, the more because she felt her heart crying out to him. The more powerless in this direction she felt herself to be the more strenuously did she exert herself to effect Tom's subjugation. Her last hope to this end lay in her adopting the rôle of a devotee. From not one




service in the week was Desirée absent. With demure face and downcast eyes she attended Confirmation and singing-classes, and often became Mrs. Bourne's messenger to carry gifts of food and clothing to the poor in the hope of meeting Tom.

CHAPTER XXI.

DREARY UNDERTHWAITE AGAIN.

PATIENCE was awoke early on the next morning by the bustle of her more fortunate school-fellows' departure—those who had to catch early trains. She heard the horses' hoofs stamp on the gravel outside, the bumping of the boxes, and Pebbles' voice calling out 'whoa' to his old steed—which reminded her of the day on which he had silently driven her to this usually silent place. How long ago it seemed! And what an experience of misery the last three months had brought to her! The dreary, silent Sundays, when all sat with a dry sermon-book or religious biography in their hands and appeared to read, though, probably like Patience, the thoughts of all were far away from their books; the horrid interviews with Mr. Sheepshanks, when he 'probed her conscience,' as he called it, as mercilessly as any Ritualist priest or Jesuit might have done; the denunciatory lectures which he delivered once a week, and which left his hearers wretched and hopeless, or 'scoffing and reckless'—as he said Patience was; the scanty, coarse food; the bitter cold with the penalties insisted upon—in the shape of lines to be written with



frozen, chilblained fingers—if one approached the fire; the scrutinized letters; the repelled affections. The sum total of all this *must* be that ‘Abomination of Desolation’ which was so often upon Mr. Sheepshanks’ lips! Many of the girls kissed her ‘good-bye,’ and one or two spoke words of sympathy to her and promised to write to her. Miss Crowbourn spoke encouragingly to her and told her that ‘the month’s holiday would soon be over.’ Miss Curdon found an opportunity of telling Patience that she might ‘go into her bedroom whenever she liked, and make use of the books and anything else there which might help to make her happy,’ and she kissed her warmly. Miss Threlton kissed her coldly, and with inquisitorial eyes behind her tinted spectacles, looked at her intently, saying, ‘To be good is to be happy, Patience. It will depend upon yourself whether you spend a happy holiday or not.’ Miss Pickford, as she passed Patience, hissed out, ‘You do not deserve any holiday, Patience Genuflex!’ While Miss Amy, after running, or rather waddling out to the carriage to stow away an armful of parcels and help her sister to be comfortably seated, upon some slight pretext came back to the hall where Patience was standing, and, drawing her aside, pulled out from under her cloak a little bag of bright-coloured pieces and skeins of silk, and told Patience she ‘would find it a great comfort to make some pretty patchwork for a cushion or something for “mother.”’ This touched Patience, for she knew that Miss Amy must have had to effect some troublesome manœuvres before she could have got even

that little bag privately to its destination. She flung her arms round Miss Amy's neck, and received a genuine sympathetic hug and kiss in return. Miss Pickford's peremptory voice sounding from the carriage hastened the dear lady's movements to precipitation, and in trying to hurry she fell headlong down the steps of the hall-door, plastering her cloak with mud (for there was a thaw, for a wonder!) She picked herself up tolerably quickly, and, amid a few scathing remarks from her sister, took her seat. When the carriage rolled away, Patience felt that she had lost a true friend, though a timid one.

The holidays did not turn out so dismally for Patience as she had feared. As the big schoolroom fires could not be lit on her account, she spent much of her time in the house-keeper's room with Fitz-simon and Mrs. Hunter, the house-keeper. Mrs. Hunter was a Londoner, and had, during her life in London, developed a *penchant* for the colour commonly called 'London smoke.'

'It does not shew the dirt like these yer blues and reds and greens,' she said, 'and weers well. Most lydys in London wears black in winter, but "London smoke" is more cheerful like and has a stylish look in my hopinion.'

So 'London smoke' was the colour of Mrs. Hunter's dresses and ribbons; and as she had been for years at Underthwaite, and had a decided character, she had affected her environment (instead of her environment, as is usual, having affected her), and 'London smoke' was the colour of the curtains, table-cloth, kettle-holders, and cushions in her comfortable room. It is a dingy, sad

colour, but so peaceful, and, by comparison, so happy were the hours which Patience spent in Mrs. Hunter's room, that ever after she loved the colour of 'London smoke' with a dash of bronze—like firelight—in it.

Miss Lemon and Mr. Sheepshanks were seldom seen by Patience during that month, except the former at morning and evening prayers, and the latter on Sundays. Prayers were shorter during the holidays, as though Miss Lemon thought that their length ought to depend upon the number of people who were present at them. But, though the weekly lecture was suspended, Mr. Sheepshanks did not abate the length of his orations from the pulpit. Always of man's depravity and of God's vengeance he preached, and so graphic were his descriptions of the harassments of conscience when 'conviction of sin' should take place, of the horrors of mind of those who 'quenched the Spirit,' and of the tortures of Hell when the preponderating hosts of those who gave themselves up to 'a reprobate mind' should reach that yawning gulf of fire and torment, that Patience would lie awake in the big, empty, white room of which she was the solitary occupant, wishing that she had never been born; wondering why God had made so many billions and quadrillions of people when He knew from the beginning that they would almost all tread the 'broad way that leadeth to destruction,' for 'strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto Eternal life, and few there be that find it.' Who were the 'few,' she wondered. Miss Lemon and Mr. Sheepshanks and Miss Pickford?

Not Miss Amy she was afraid, because she did not spurn and condemn a 'reprobate' like her. Well, if Miss Amy was not in the 'narrow way,' and Miss Curdon and those who were kind to her, she would, too, prefer to be in 'the broad way;' and with this thought she fell asleep and dreamed of fire and blackness, and of being lost, and of hordes of devils all wearing faces like Miss Lemon and Mr. Sheepshanks. Now and then she caught sight of the door of Heaven, and a face peeping out like little Mercy's or her mother's or Miss Amy's, but only for a moment, for the devils swarmed about her, and she became lost among them, and tried in vain to gain one more glimpse of the door of Heaven.

'Few there be that find it,' she murmured, as she tossed from side to side; and Mrs. Hunter, who was making her usual tour through the house to see that all lights were extinguished and that there was no danger of fire, stopped with shaded light to look at the restless sleeper.

'Few there be that find it!' she repeated, 'find what? Oh! I remember, "the narrow way."' It strikes me that more will find it than some think, and that some who think they are in it will find themselves in quite a hopposite direction. This poor child has been worried nigh unto madness in the short time she has been here. She's 'igh-sperrited and not to be bent like them pore dull things, she'll be broke fust;' and with a shrewd, but kindly look, she passed on.

The next night, and until the end of the holidays,

Patience slept in a little bed made up in the house-keeper's bedroom.

She was allowed to go into the garden in the morning, and that was her chief pleasure in that sad time. The thaw continued for a fortnight and worked wonders in the garden beds. Some double-white primroses seemed to mistake their time of blooming, and Patience felt a thrill of joy when she discovered their pure white rosettes under a laurustinus, which itself was covered with its umbels of neat blossoms. She found the first snowdrops too, and one or two Christmas roses, and some golden aconites enjoying the mild sunshine on their green-frilled cushions. Patience would bend over the flowers and talk to them as though they had intelligence (and who can positively say that they have not?). Fielding, the old brown-looking gardener, was always working in the garden—rolling the lawn, raking the gravel, tidying the beds. Patience was drawn to him, and now that fewer eyes were watching her, she ventured to speak to the old man when a clump of shrubs screened them from view.

'What flowers will come next, Fielding?' she asked one morning as she stood in the dripping garden, feasting her eyes on the cheerful shrubs and conifers.

'There's a mortal lot of bulbs peeping out of th' airth,' said the old man. 'A wisht if t' frost wad coom.'

'But won't the frost kill them?' asked Patience.

'Na, na, not noo; but if t' sun coaxes t' bulbs up too soon, loikely t' frost 'll kill em whem tha' gits brave and big, and t' wad be pity,' he said quietly but with a look

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of concern that shewed Patience it was not she only who loved the flowers.

‘Why does God let them be nipped by frost, Fielding, I wonder!’ said Patience musingly.

‘Hush!’ said the old man looking upward apprehensively. ‘We must na wonder, for t’more us wonders t’less us understands.’

‘But why does He make us wonder then, Fielding? He gives us minds to think, and He made us and the flowers; us—to be often unhappy, and the flowers to be often nipped by the frost. Why does He let us be wicked and be burned, when He could make us quite good and fit to go to Heaven?—though if Mr. Sheepshanks and Miss Lemon go to Heaven, it cannot be a happy place for some others,’ Patience added with some bitterness.

‘Nay, nay, I know nowt o’ such things,’ said the man. ‘All a seems to kna’ is that God lives, for He makes the flowers; and that we—loike t’ flowers—must be buffeted by t’ wind and rain of trouble; and if we takes it patiently loike them, we shall come to loife again same as they do.’

Patience mused—old Fielding looked patient: had he always been so? Perhaps he had once been a ‘reprobate’ like her, and grumbled, and got angry. Did he have ‘conviction of sin’? she wondered, and did that make him quiet and patient and always work so steadily? Would *she* ever have ‘conviction of sin,’ and, if so, would it make her quiet and patient, and, and—

oh ! so dull ? And at the thought of her being so quiet and dull as poor old Fielding, Patience laughed softly to herself, saying—‘No, no, I shall be a “reprobate” until I am quite old, and then, perhaps, I shall have “conviction of sin,” and try to make myself fit for Heaven and for Miss Lemon’s and Mr. Sheepshanks’ company there !’

CHAPTER XXII.

GOD? OR THE CURATE?

DID ever bells ring out so merrily as did 'Barfield chimes' on that Sunday morning? Jack Frost had been busy during the night, and there lay the slight fall of snow of the afternoon before—pure, but resplendent with myriad, scintillating points of dazzling frost-diamonds. Each tree-twigg was hung with the sparkling jewels. Each prosy housetop flashed back a morning greeting to the sun. The blue smoke curled upwards through the crisp winter air from grey or red chimney, telling of comfort and warmth and domestic happiness in many a home. On rang the bells—and Barfield people right willingly obeyed their summons to prayer. More than one carriage drew up at the church-yard gate, and while the satiny-coated horses champed their bits and tossed their heads, fair ladies—fur-clad and bejewelled and waited upon by tall liveried footmen—daintily descended and mingled with the crowd which was moving towards the porch. The strains of the organ rose and fell upon the ear as the chimes ceased, and only the 'clergyman's bell' continued to ring. Inside, the church was soon filled with people—a decent,

orderly congregation. High above all—at the east end of the church—rose the altar, quite nine steps above the nave of the church; the silken sanctuary hangings embroidered with golden orphreys throwing the white marble altar—with shining brass Cross and vases, filled with arum lilies and Roman hyacinths, on super-altar—into strong relief. Pillar and railing and corona were everywhere still wreathed with the Christmas decorations of shining holly and ivy. The light of the short winter day was dimmed by the ‘cathedral glass’ which filled the windows of the nave, but the three chancel windows were of richly-stained glass, and through that on the south side of the church streamed the low, long rays of sunshine; and, taking their hues from the beautiful window, lit upon the snow-white surplices of the choir-boys, dyeing them purple, gold, and red, and every rainbow tint.

The scene from the great west door was a beautiful one; and so thought Frank Bourne as he followed his aunt and cousin up the nave.


Most of the congregation were kneeling. The reverent hush—(helped by the now solemn, now plaintive strains of the organ)—seemed to affect each newcomer. The languorous perfumes of the hyacinths and gardenias grew more powerful as the chancel was neared. Frank noticed more than one woman in an apparent ecstasy as he passed them. Their eyes were turned towards the altar, their lips moved, and a seraphic smile hovered over their features.

By the time he had bent the knee and taken his seat, Dr. Bourne and his curate had taken their places, and the voluntary was dying away.

Young Genuflex bore a rapt expression—half of joy, half of reverence. He bent head and knee as he passed the altar on his way to the prayer-desk, and, half intoxicated with the scent of flowers and the melting symphonies of the organ, he muttered almost audibly, 'Surely this is the House of God! surely this is the Gate of Heaven!'

Dr. Bourne sat on the north side of the altar. His demeanour was quiet and reverent; he used no Crossings, and few bowings, and, evidently on that account did not attract much attention from the younger part of the congregation—especially the female part. The eyes of all these were riveted upon the curate's thin pale face. He looked the embodiment of saintly abstinence. He seldom raised his eyelids, and often made the sign of the Cross upon forehead and breast.

Frank Bourne felt some amusement at Genuflex's 'advanced' gestures and appearance, and—to see the effect of them upon the congregation—allowed his eyes to rove from his prayer book. The first face which arrested his attention was that of Desirée. Her eyes were bent upon her book, except when—now and again—she looked at Genuflex: her pouting, rosy lips were slightly compressed as though to curb her natural propensity to laugh or smile. She joined in chanting the Psalms, and bent her knee reverently at the sacred Name when she helped



to sing the hymns; and instead of frills and feathers as hitherto, she was attired in simple black. Frank was puzzled, but as for a moment their eyes met, he caught a flash from Desirée's dark eye, and noted a flitting mocking smile pass over her face—as evanescent as it was eloquent. Desirée was acting! He noticed other black-clad women and girls: some were demurely devotional, some were apparently in a frenzy of devotion, their bowings and Crossings being incessant, and almost all—without exception—wore Crosses—yes Crosses, not *a* Cross. One Cross was suspended round the neck, one hung at the waist; their books wore red or white or gold Crosses on their backs, and from between their pages hung book-markers with Crosses at the ends of them. The leaven of Genuflex's teaching was working well! Barfield might soon become a hotbed of saints!

Sunday being a feast-day, Genuflex accepted the cordial invitation to meet Frank at luncheon, which the Rector gave to him.

'And mind, Laura, that the soup is extra strong to-day, and help Genuflex to the best of everything, for between his fasts and penance he has become a skeleton and ghastly white. If any sickness seizes that lad he would never pull through.'

'So strong and healthy-looking as he was a few months ago too!' he muttered to himself as Mrs. Bourne hurried away to interview the cook.

Tom Genuflex had greatly changed in appearance during the past few months. His regular and severe

fasts had brought his body into subjection to his will. He had lost flesh; he had lost colour; he had lost a good deal of the fire of youth. He looked delicate; he looked more than delicate—he looked ethereal. He prayed much and earnestly, and his thoughts did not wander while he prayed as they formerly did. He lived for the Church; he would, if necessary, die for the Church; he tried to be an embodiment of faithful Churchmanship. He kept every Fast and Feast. He visited diligently in the parish—high and low, rich and poor alike, but more particularly the poor. He started guilds and societies to improve morals and to foster Anglicanism. He even ventured to talk to women and girls and enlist them in these guilds, for his body was now in subjection to his spirit. He lived hard and indulged in no extravagances of toilet, dress, books, or other delights, in order that he might have money for the poor, the Church, and all guilds, societies, or associations which were sanctioned by the Church. It was whispered among his faithful followers—chiefly girls and women—that he wore a horse-hair shirt, slept on a bare board, and fasted until he fainted for want of food. His demeanour had become quiet and gentle, and by his faithful followers and admirers he was often spoken of as ‘that angel,’ ‘that saint,’ ‘that martyr.’ By Mr. Holden he was called ‘papist, anti-Christ, hypocrite.’ Mr. Bourne smiled at him and restrained him; Frank, while respecting his evident sincerity, openly laughed at his extreme views and practices; Mrs. Bourne remonstrated with him and

argued with him about his hyper-Ritualistic customs; the Church-people generally bore with him, many loved him, and even those who did not approve of his advanced views upon religion liked him and admired his moral courage and consistent life. The Dissenters hated him, for by his almsgiving he enticed their poorer people to join the Church, and by the frequent services—most of them choral—he allured the well-to-do amongst them to follow him. In fact, Mr. Holden's receipts for the last quarter had dwindled to half what they used to be, and he was on the look-out for another 'call' in consequence.


CHAPTER XXIII.

AN IMPREGNABLE FORTRESS.

DESIRÉE had kept her own counsel about her love passages with Tom, so that the change in her appearance and life were as great a surprise as a pleasure to all who were interested in the gay French girl.

Tom alone—who had suffered at her hands—doubted the genuine nature of the change in Desirée. Sometimes he surprised a look in her eyes which startled him, a look of intense yearning which he had not seen there formerly. It appealed to him in spite of his having solemnly resolved never again to know the love of woman, especially of her who had been so treacherous to him. But he treated Desirée's eloquent but mute demonstration of feeling for him as a temptation of Satan, and took pains to avoid meeting her in his walks or in going to and from Church Services and classes.

One day, however, he was slowly and wearily walking back to his rooms, when, about half a mile from the High School, he saw Desirée leaning on the very gate where, a few weeks before, he and she, carried away in



the irresistible whirl of love, had declared their love for each other.

Tom thought of turning back, but reproached himself for cowardice. He slowly approached the gate hoping that Desirée would merely bow and let him pass. His mind misgave him, however, when he saw Desirée turn and deliberately fix her eyes upon his face. He scarcely ventured to look at her, but one glance had been sufficient to show that lovely face with a new beauty in it.

Tom was pale and thin, and walked wearily, so that, with her natural vanity, Desirée put down his altered appearance to the suffering which her repulse had brought upon him. Instantly a great pity filled her heart, which had already gone out to this man who so calmly had accepted her decision about their love, and this pity softened her glorious beauty. Her eyes looked at him beseechingly, the corners of her lips drooped: one hand she laid on her beating heart, the other was outstretched in a suppliant manner to him.

Tom raised his hat and would have passed on, but Desirée's appearance compelled him to stop. 'Good morning, Mademoiselle Meudon,' he said.

'Oh! Mr. Genuflex! I am desolated to look upon you,' said Desirée irrelevantly. 'I desire you to pardon me. Have I wounded your poor heart?'

Tom knew not how to answer this impulsive girl. There she stood before him: her face filled with a great pity; her heart, he knew, now throbbing with love,

however evanescent it might prove; her lips quivering, her eyes filled with tears. Was his love for her really dead? It seemed so, for he quietly greeted her with a slight handshake. Then, looking away from that siren-face to the ground, he slowly answered her question.

‘Yes, you wounded my heart, Mademoiselle, but the wound is healing. You are sorry? then never lightly play at love-making again. It is a dangerous game. One of the two who take part in it must always suffer, and may not know where to find healing as I know. I forgive you readily.’ He raised his hat and would have passed on, but Desirée flung herself on the grass at his feet, embracing and kissing them passionately. Her tears were falling fast.

‘Oh! Mr. Genuflex! I am in a grand misery. Me, I thought it was necessary to have money for to live happy. It was one grand mistake! I do love you with my total heart. Whatever arrives I will love you entirely. Regard my tears, my anguish, and say that you love me one little piece, Mr. Genuflex,’ and Desirée held up her hands to him beseechingly.

Tom put down his hand to lift her from the ground. He was shocked at the whole scene, and felt thankful that the lane was a most unfrequented one. Desirée, too much blinded with her tears to notice Tom’s expression of repulsion, seized his hand and covered it with kisses before Tom could free it from her grasp.

‘This must not be, Mademoiselle,’ he said, ‘we will be good friends, and I hope you will soon meet with some

kind man who will value your love. I have forsworn love, as you understand it, for ever. I mean to devote my life to Christ and the work of Christ in the Church. I shall never marry.'

Tom looked straight at Desirée. Her long black hair had escaped from its bonds and fell in waving, glossy cascades over her shoulders, down to her waist. Her white throat curved gracefully as she lifted her face towards his; two tears had been arrested in their fall, and stood glistening and trembling in her eyes, which still looked piteously at him; her breast rose and fell as the fluttering breath passed through her half-open mouth. Tom could feel its warmth as she leaned towards him.

When Desirée heard Tom's solemn words she first shivered slightly, then said—

'This is what you English peoples call "tit-for-tat," is it not? You give me your love, truly. I did fling it afar. Now it is poor Desirée who gives her heart to you, and you do reject it—throw it far like one ball. Well, I do not go to become *devôte*. Me, I would be the good wife for you, but you wish it not. Then it is necessary now much more for me to find the money to recover my so-much wounded heart. Adieu.'

This was the last time that Tom met Desirée for a long time to come.

One of the High School girls had gone to Tom's home as governess to his little sister and her brothers.

It had struck Miss Parker that as Desirée had been so much altered in demeanour and appearance lately, she

might require a little change of air and scene. She therefore suggested that Miss Dart should come to visit her old school-fellows for two or three weeks, and that Desirée should fill her place during her absence from Lapton Vicarage..

CHAPTER XXIV.

"A WORM WILL TURN!"



SILENCE, girls, silence!

Instantly the Babel of voices was hushed as Miss Pickford's rasping utterance penetrated through it all to every ear. Stern and spare and brown-clad as usual, she stood—pencil and mark-book in hand—by the second schoolroom door; motionless, but for the turn of her dull brown eyes from side to side, seeking out the lazy, the indifferent, the sly, the disobedient—if there dared to be any such with such eyes upon them. The first bell for dinner—called the 'preparation-bell'—had rung. Usually, the girls were allowed to speak during the five minutes which elapsed between the ringing of this and the first dinner-bell. But Miss Pickford seldom missed an opportunity of exerting her authority and making her presence unpleasantly felt, so the girls in that schoolroom silently put away their books or work. When the first dinner-bell rang, they ranged themselves in files—each file being a class—in readiness to be ordered to march into the dining-hall, where two classes sat at each long table. The mistresses sat two or three at each end of the tables,

where rather better food than was given to the girls could be more conveniently served to them.

'First table!' Miss Pickford called out, and two classes filed past her amid a few admonitions—

'Hold up your head!' to one.

'Do not tread so heavily as though you were an elephant, Mary!' to another.

'Always look straight before you, and not slyly through the corner of your eyes, Mina,' to a timid girl.

'Second table!' and so on till all had filed past her. She then brought up the rear, and when she reached the hall ordered the last girl to ring the second dinner-bell. Scarcely was the last girl seated in the dining-hall, when Miss Lemon appeared, followed by the mistresses. The girls immediately rose to their feet as was their custom when Miss Lemon entered the dining-hall or school-rooms.

Cold and repellant, Miss Lemon slowly advanced to the furthest end of the furthest table; her steelly eyes searching in all directions if, by chance, she could find some fault with anyone. Suddenly she stood still, and, for one moment, looked horrified; then, in a freezing voice and with her usual sneer upon her lips, she hissed out—

'Patience Genuflex, are you ill?'

'No, Miss Lemon,' said Patience, rising as she answered, for she had remained seated.

'Why then do you sit when I enter the room?'

'Because, because—I can't tell you,' said Patience,

first smiling, then, as she felt those eyes transfixing her, looking grave and frightened.

'Patience Genuflex, you are a wicked, deceitful, lying girl, and you are corrupting the whole school. You *can* tell, and I insist upon your stating your reason for remaining seated.' Miss Lemon spoke quietly, but the sneer on her lips was intensified, and her eyes had grown dark as a midnight sky unlighted by the moon.

Patience grew tall with wrath, and her eyes flashed as she hotly replied—

'I may be wicked, Miss Lemon, but I am neither deceitful nor lying, nor do I corrupt anyone. If you want to know why I sat, it was to see how you would look when you saw me, and if you want to know why I could not tell you, it was because I thought it would be rude and defiant to give you my reason before all the girls,' and Patience burst into a fit of indignant weeping at the accusations which had been publicly thrown at her.

There was silence for the space of several seconds. At last Miss Lemon spoke—

'Patience Genuflex, you will be kept in solitary confinement until you are ready to make a public apology to me for your gross insolence. After that we shall decide upon whether or not you must be expelled. Go, you know where to, as it is by no means your first "solitary confinement."'

Patience darted from her place, her cheeks wet with tears, but her head proudly erect. When she reached

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the door she turned, and, waving her hand, said—‘Good bye, girls,’ and vanished.

Miss Lemon calmly and coldly continued her way to her accustomed seat. When she reached it she folded her hands in a prayerful attitude, and turning her eyes heavenward, said a long grace.

Patience slowly went up-stairs and through the deserted corridors and rooms to ‘the den.’ Her tears had as suddenly ceased to flow as they had begun—dried up by the hot passion of indignant rage which Miss Lemon’s sneering and cold-blooded accusations had aroused. She stood in the middle of the dreary, white-washed room where the most miserable and unhappy days of her young life had been spent, but she did not remember the dreariness of her prison. She only remembered that Miss Lemon had dubbed her ‘lying and deceitful’ before the whole school and her governesses—she, who would undergo any punishment rather than evade it by a lie or any dishonourable conduct. Patience was essentially truthful—by nature and by bringing-up. Her mother had taught her children to be open and honourable—had taught them that a stigma was attached to anyone who could be found capable of lying and deceit, and if any such were known by the young Genuflexes they were regarded with surprise and dislike. To them lying was the ‘unpardonable sin.’ Their faults were many: they were rough and rebellious; idle and careless; disobedient and passionate; they quarrelled and fought and made up and fought again; some of them were selfish, sometimes

greedy—but lying!—not one of them. Many a thrashing from their father, and—when they were little ones—a whipping from their mother, could they have escaped if they could have lied. But lying was against their nature and against their training, and lie they would not, nor could.

Patience had vowed to her mother when she was at home for the holidays lately, that the next time she was put in that horrid 'den' she would 'run away' from school. Her mother had reasoned with her, and assured Patience that the awful disgrace of expulsion must overtake her if she became guilty of such a flagrant act of rebellion as running away from school; and expulsion meant a life-long disgrace. Mrs. Genuflex's sympathies were all with her high-spirited and generous-hearted child, but she dared not encourage her by showing it. She felt that the rigorous discipline and monotonous routine of the life at Underthwaite School was most unsuitable for her mental and moral welfare, and that her faults were disproportionately and unwisely punished—chiefly by 'solitary confinement.' Mr. Genuflex, on the other hand, was so steeped in Evangelicalism, and so greatly admired Mr. Sheepshanks and the Evangelical lines on which the school was conducted, that he believed Patience to be a privileged girl 'to be under such good Evangelical influences.' 'Her high spirit, too, required curbing:' she was, even now, with all the good influences around her, too ready to question his authority when she was at home; to rebuke him by look of surprise or

indignation, and even by word when she considered he was too exacting or inconsiderate towards her mother.

Patience had declared to her mother that only once more should she ever be put in 'the den.' She had, during her last confinement there, examined the window, and found that by removing one bar of iron she could pass through it and slide down a sloping roof which lay under it, and allow herself to fall into a thicket of laurel and laurustinus which grew beneath it. She had provided herself with a turnscrew (which she always carried about her person), by means of which she had intended to loosen the screws which secured the bar. When she had said 'Good bye, girls,' to her school-fellows, it was with the idea that the time for carrying out her project had arrived, and she was determined to do it.

But as Patience stood quivering with rage in 'the den,' she suddenly remembered that as yet the lock of the door had not been turned upon her—that dinner was going on; and that she might make her escape without the risk of breaking a limb or perchance her neck. Quick as lightning she retraced her way through the corridors, down the stairs, into the first schoolroom to get her purse—containing about two shillings—from her locker. She had just put it into her pocket, and a small cape round her shoulders, and was turning to fly from the room—for time was passing—when she saw Miss Curdon enter. Miss Curdon started when she saw Patience, and said kindly—

'My dear child, I thought you were in "the den!"'

'So I was, Miss Curdon, but it is a hateful place, and I cannot stay there. *You* do not believe I lied, do you?' Patience asked anxiously.

'No, Patience, I have always found you truthful,' Miss Curdon answered, and intuitively understanding that Patience was trying to escape from the school, she led her quickly by the hand to the large cupboards in the lobby by the playground door, and reaching a hat to her, threw her arms round the girl and kissed her.

'Good bye, Patience! I shall miss you, and may never see you again, but I shall never forget you. Go as far as you can from here before night, and write to me soon. Here is my purse; there is not much in it, but it may help you. Good bye.'

Patience returned Miss Curdon's embrace heartily, then turned and fled.

There was a buzz of voices and a trampling of feet as Miss Curdon turned to take her place in the first school-room as governess-in-charge for the afternoon. Patience had only escaped 'by the skin of her teeth!'

CHAPTER XXV.

DESIREE AT LAPTON VICARAGE.

WHEN the children heard that a young French-woman was coming to take care of them, there was great excitement.

'Does she eat frogs and snails, Mary?' asked Tommy.

Tommy's baptismal name was Fred, but he was so ludicrously like his eldest brother, that by one consent he was dubbed 'little Tom' or 'Tommy.'

'Yes,' laughingly answered Mary, 'she brought some potted frogs to Miss Parker as a present from her father when she first came to school, and I have seen her eating them. I have not seen her eating snails, but she assured us that they were delicious; "gross, fat, white ones," she said they were.'

'Well,' said Jack sturdily, 'we eat sea-snails or periwinkles, and I dare say if we put plenty of salt with the other snails they would taste just as nice.'

'Is the French lady black?' asked Mercy, looking very solemn.

There was a volley of laughter at this, but Mary, taking little Mercy on her knee, said—

'Oh! no; Desirée is just like any English lady, only she talks a great deal, and laughs a good deal, and moves her hands and shoulders when she talks. No one ever feels dull where Desirée is, for she is full of fun.'

'I shall like her, then,' said Hal: 'I hate those sticks of women who walk as though they were skewered, and smile as though they were only allowed to do so just so many times in an hour. Can she talk English, Mary?'

'Yes, but you must not expect her to talk it like your mother or as I do. She has been very clever to learn to speak English so quickly, for she scarcely knew any when she first came to Barfield, about three years ago.'

On a Saturday morning Mary left for Barfield, and Mrs. Genuflex had not realized, until her young friend had gone, how much she would miss her if she were now obliged to do without her. The extra Saturday's work of mending and cooking and preparing for Sunday had to be got through. The children had a holiday, and as there was a sharp frost and it was a fine day, they amused themselves by sliding and sledging most of the day.

At four o'clock Mr. Genuflex set out in the old carriage to Kirkton Station to meet Mademoiselle Meudon. Mrs. Genuflex called the children together to see that they made themselves presentable.

'You boys must wash your faces and hands clean, and really, you must put on your clean collars for tea, and try to make them do for to-morrow as well. Here, Mercy, come to be washed.' The poor woman was too

busy to notice that the boys were whispering and giggling, but she overheard Tommy saying—

‘Mind you don’t tell, Mercy!’ and Mercy earnestly replying, ‘No, Tommy, I’ll be *sure* not to.’

‘What are you not to tell, Mercy?’ asked Mrs. Genuflex as she took hold of the child’s hand and led her up-stairs. ‘I hope it is nothing naughty!’

‘Oh! no, muvver; it is something quite good, but it is mean to break a p’omise, so I can’t tell you, but it begins with S,’ she compromised.

Tea was laid and the fire burned brightly. The boys’ faces shone—so much soap they had applied to them—and little Mercy looked like a cherub in her frilled white pinafore, and with her golden curls clustering round her head, and her innocent, wide-open eyes. There was still some whispering going on.

‘What are you boys up to?’ said mother, smilingly; ‘nothing that will annoy your father, I hope?’

‘It’s a secret,’ said Hal, ‘but you’ll soon know it, mother.’

Mrs. Genuflex set the toast, which she had been making, on the table, smoothed an imperceptible crease out of the tablecloth, and poured the boiling water into the tea-pot, for she heard the carriage wheels crunching the gravel outside.

‘Here they are!’ shouted Jack, and eager curiosity was stamped on every face.

Mr. Genuflex entered, and waving his hand towards

Mrs. Genuflex with an especially courtly air—for him—said—

‘This is my wife, Mademoiselle Meudon, and here are our children.’

Desirée threw one rapid glance over the group, then ran up to Mrs. Genuflex, kissing her and exclaiming—‘But you are the nice lady! Mary has told us in numerous letters how so good you are and merciful. And these angels pertain to you too?’

‘Angels have got wings,’ said Jack, looking searchingly behind Mercy’s shoulders to see if perchance these appendages had grown—unawares to him.

Mrs. Genuflex hastily named the children to her guest, and hurried her up-stairs to take off her things, for she was in terror lest her high-spirited and rather unruly boys might make some remark which would sound rude. At the door she turned and shook her finger in a menacing way at the children and looked so really stern that they knew they had better be on their best behaviour when their mother and Desirée returned. They were scarcely seated at tea when Mercy jumped down from her high chair and ran out of the room, returning in a minute with a plate which she took to Desirée, and tried to set before her.

‘And what have you carried to me, my dear?’ said Desirée.

‘Somet’ing you like *very* much,’ said Mercy, nodding her head up and down. ‘Snails.’

‘But you are very kind,’ said Desirée, and the boys

looked triumphant that their gift had been so graciously received. Desirée placed them in front of her other plate, smiling sweetly.

'What do you mean, Mercy? Who cooked those snails?' said her father, sternly.

'Mary, the servant,' said Mercy, looking frightened when she saw how angry her father was.

'This is your devilry, Tommy, I expect,' said he, turning to the eldest boy.

'I thought Miss Meudon liked snails,' said Tommy, 'and we had lots of trouble to get them, for they had all gone to sleep for the winter, but John helped us to find them in holes in the old wall, and "Mary the servant" cooked them with salt and pepper, and we ate some ourselves, and they were *beautiful*,' said the boy almost defiantly.

'And I kept the secret and didn't tell muvver,' said Mercy, looking happy, as she saw her father's amused look.

'I am exceedingly sorry, Mademoiselle Meudon,' said Mr. Genuflex politely, 'at this seeming rudeness, but the children evidently believed that you would like them;' and he rang the bell for the servant to take the snails away.

'But they are very good children,' said Desirée, 'I love them all. I thank you greatly,' she said smilingly, and looking at them each in turn, and each child smiled back at the sparkling, merry, friendly face.

'They really meant well,' said Mrs. Genuflex, 'so pray forgive them.'

They all spent a happy hour together after tea. Desirée talked French with Mrs. Genuflex, to the delight of the children, and then taught them to sing the old French catch—

‘Frère Jaques,
Dormez-vous,
Sonnez la battina,
Bim, bam, boo,’

and then chatted merrily with them until it was time for the little ones to go and have their Saturday-night’s ‘tub.’

CHAPTER XXVI.

RESOURCEFUL DESIRÉE.

FRANK BOURNE had been spending the Christmas vacation with his father at Lapton. During his stay, the Squire had two or three times invited his old friend Genuflex and his wife, with Miss Dart, to dinner. Now that Desirée had come to take Mary's place for a time, Frank seemed to think that he would not be honouring dear Barfield if he did not give one dinner in Desirée's honour, though he did not express his thoughts in words.

To say that Desirée was excited at the prospect of dining at Lapton would be far too mild a description of her state. She was frantic with joy. She could only skip and dance and terrify little Mercy by seizing her round the waist and tossing her up to the air and then smothering her shrieks with kisses. The vicar and his wife did not know whether to love or to dislike this excitable French girl! They would, in turn, try to administer some slight reproof to her, but by her droll way of receiving it, the reproof would become a laugh.

'Dear Mr. Genuflex, is it that your collars and cuffs are

so pure? It is me that can steel them so good! We had the lessons to steel at the High School. And may I retrench your moustaches?' and she ran to the table for her scissors. 'I will make you like one Adonis!' she added triumphantly, but Mr. Genuflex, half-frightened, half-laughing, retreated from the room.

'Mrs. Genuflex, do permit me to embellish *you*! Your adjustments, are they all ready?' Laughing, Mrs. Genuflex told Desirée she might come and see if they would do.

They spent an hour in Mrs. Genuflex's bedroom. The poor lady was on pins and needles lest her husband should happen to come up there and see the wonderful litter of laces, frills, feathers, and ancient dresses, but Desirée laughed—"Laissez-moi faire!"

She had fished out a beautiful old white satin dress—cream-coloured with age—on which were powdered bunches of life-like flowers.

'This will do, *par enchantement*, Mrs. Genuflex. It is ravishing! One has only to place some of this *dentelle magnifique*—this rich lace you do call it—about your throat and on the sleeves to cause you to be one Helen!' and with a few deft touches she quite modernized the dress by pinning the lace in the style of the day on bodice and skirt. When she had made Mrs. Genuflex put it on, and made one or two alterations in the arrangement of the lace, she said—

'Now we will together sew it,' and seated herself by the window with the dress and her sewing implements.

'But is *your* dress ready, Desirée?' asked Mrs. Genuflex.

'Me, I have guarded that,' said Desirée, and went on sewing.

What persons shall we encounter at Lapton Hall?' asked Desirée presently, as she rapidly sewed.

'Mr. Bourne and his sister Miss Bourne and Mr. Frank, a Mr. Portal and his nephew—Mr. Brandon, and Mr. Frank's friend at the University—Mr. Laing,' replied Mrs. Genuflex.

'That shall be a big assembly!' said Desirée joyously; 'Mr. Boufne is *passé*, also is Mr. Portal, perhaps, but there will be three young gentlemen that one can wish for; and if one will fail to produce an effect upon these so young gentlemens, one can fall back upon the ancients.'

'What nonsense you do talk, Desirée!' said Mrs. Genuflex, quite shocked at Desirée's open scheming.

'It will be more wicked nonsense if I do never find a *parti*! Me, I go not to live celibate; that life is too sad for me. If the young gentlemen do have the hearts of marble, I will acquire the heart of one ancient. Always the ancients do make obliging and affable husbands; they are complaisant always.

'Desirée,' said Mrs. Genuflex severely, 'you are very young to talk like this. You need not think of marriage for many years, but try to improve your mind.'

'But that is *galimathias*,' said Desirée laughing. 'I have taken example of one affair; that is—no woman when she does not possess a fortune can take or leave a *parti* as she desires; she is constrained to approve the

good proposition which first does present itself; and if no propositions do come, then must she search on one side and on the other for one.'

'Oh! Desirée! it is not a woman's place to do that!'

'Attend, till I make you to see it,' said Desirée, 'but—*vous saurez quelle est mon intention.*'

She had become too excited to use any but her native tongue, and, jumping up, she shook out the now completed dress, and hastily kissing Mrs. Genuflex, she laid it upon the bed and ran out of the room.

Dinners at Lapton Hall were always pleasant affairs. Miss Bourne was a good hostess, and Mr. Bourne a genial and chatty host. Mr. Genuflex never had looked so polished as he did that evening. His cuffs and collars had never looked so nice, and certainly his whiskers had been 'retrenched'—for which he looked much the better. Mrs. Genuflex looked as magnificent as so small a woman could look. Her dress was really lovely, and as she and Miss Bourne were old friends, the latter ventured to compliment her on her appearance.

'Ah! it is that child!' she exclaimed, mystifying Miss Bourne for one moment, but when Mrs. Genuflex noticed this she added—

'Desirée has great taste about dress and millinery, and she got me to fish up this old dress—which may have been my grandmother's—from the depths of my wardrobe, and altered and trimmed it to suit me in no time. But I fear it looks too grand for my position, Miss Bourne.'

'It becomes you beautifully,' said Miss Bourne, 'and, to my eye, suits your position exactly.'

She said the words sincerely and kindly, and Mrs. Genuflex felt pleased, yet she could not help thinking that, beautiful as her own dress—which was a resurrection—was, it would not have suited stately Miss Bourne half so well as the handsome black moiré-antique, relieved by old lace and flashing diamonds, which that lady wore.

How did Desirée look? As she herself had pronounced when she ran into Mrs. Genuflex's room to consult the cheval glass—'Ravishing, superb, exquisite! *Vraiment, je suis charmante!*' she had decided.

And she did look lovely! If everyone did not say so, each one felt it. What she wore I cannot tell you. It was something thin and not very light in colour, which seemed to float around her perfect figure and shew its lovely curves rather than to hide them. There was a suspicion of scarlet here and there about her dress and hair, which set off her clear dark skin, and toned with the bright rose of her cheek. Her eyes danced and shone, her lovely lips pouted and smiled in turns. Ned Brandon took her in to dinner, two sisters from the neighbourhood falling to Frank and Laing's share, Mr. Portal taking Miss Bourne, and Mr. Bourne taking Mrs. Genuflex, while Mr. Genuflex escorted a lively widow. It was a merry party, for genial Mr. Bourne never allowed etiquette to smother friendliness at his table.

Frank sat at one side of Desirée and Ned Brandon at the other.

Desirée had hitherto used all her arts and blandishments to win 'the young Squire of Lapton.' Frank was always polite to her, and a little amused at the vivacious French girl's daring coquetries, but she felt that she made no advances in his favour. He was on this night devoted to entertaining his partner, so Desirée bestowed her chief attention upon her other neighbour—Ned Brandon—who, she knew, was—as far as money was concerned—a most eligible *parti*, though he was pitifully weak-minded. At first Ned looked shy, and almost frightened of his animated and talkative partner, but she was pleasant to look upon, her voice was merry and musical, and—above all—she rattled on without his having the trouble of answering her questions, so that at last he became quite interested in watching her and listening to her, and almost forgot to eat his dinner. Desirée perceived her advantage and proceeded to follow it up. She had taken a just measure of Ned, and saw that she had to deal with a good-natured fool.

'Have you been in the lovely and beautiful France ever, Mr. Brandon?' she asked as she daintily lifted a glass of sherry to her lips as though it were her usual drink.

'Yes, Mademoiselle Meudon, I spent the first twelve years of my life there.'

'Then you know the French language?' said Desirée joyfully.

'Yes,' said Ned shortly, 'but I like English better.'

'Then we shall converse in your tongue,' decided
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Desirée. 'Is Nashleigh far from here?' she said, trying to draw him out.

'A horrid long journey,' shortly answered Ned.

'Did you shoot some birds to-day?' she went on.

'Yes, one teal,' he said.

'Oh! one of those little bits like a duck! Mr. Bourne shewed one to me some day when we encountered him and the beautiful dogs on the road,' said Desirée.

'Do you like dogs, Mademoiselle?' asked Ned eagerly.

Now Desirée knew that Ned Brandon loved dogs better than anything else. She knew too how simple he was, and that he would be so pleased to find that she loved dogs (which she did not, particularly) that he would tell everyone to whom he spoke of her love for them; so, inclining her head towards him, she said in a low, sad voice—

'Yes, I *love* them, but I pray you do not divulge this to anyone. All the world thinks it is a folly to love the beautiful dogs, but they enchant me! And you, Mr. Brandon, I wish that you do love the dogs too. Is it so?'

'Yes,' said Ned gloomily, 'they are not foolish like women—oh! I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle Meudon, I do not mean you; you are not foolish, indeed, you are not! I like you almost as much as my favourite dog.'

'Is it so? It gives me joy to hear it!' said Desirée. 'How many dogs do you possess at Nashleigh, Mr. Brandon?'

'Let me see,' said Ned, knitting his brows, and evidently counting to himself on his fingers, for he was

touching them all in turns. 'I think I have about thirty at Nashleigh now, and as soon as I can find a good kennel-keeper I shall have twenty or thirty more, for I am going to have a pack of hounds.'

Desirée lifted her little hands, opened her eyes, and said delightedly—

'What multitudes of dogs! Oh! but you must be always glad, Mr. Brandon, with so grand number of dear dogs round you. I should like much to see them!'

'You shall see them, Mademoiselle,' said Ned doggedly.

'I will attend in happiness like one patient little lady till I see them. But yes, I will see them!'

said she enigmatically, and nodding her head.

The gentleman did not linger long over their wine and shooting stories. When they appeared in the drawing-room, Ned stood by the door until, with a searching glance into every corner and recess of the large drawing-room, he, at last, saw Desirée poring over a book at a side-table where some expensively-bound books were scattered in piles. She had—fortunately for her designs—found a finely-illustrated book 'On Dogs,' and, apparently, engrossed with the subject, did not appear to notice the entry of the gentleman. She felt that Ned was standing by her, but with a well-feigned start of surprise exclaimed—

'But this is a charming book, Mr. Brandon! It is a perfect description of every sorts of a dog. Do come and observe these portraits,' and she made an innocent gesture of invitation to him to come and sit beside her.

Ned seemed pleased, and, sitting down, he listened with approval and pleasure to the remarks which Desirée made, and—for him—he also became quite chatty.

‘See this delightful collie!’ suddenly exclaimed Desirée. ‘Mr. Bourne brought a so lovely collie to Barfield. It has pretty blue eyes like the heaven—like your eyes, Mr. Brandon,’ she said quite gravely.

‘I know,’ said Ned irrelevantly, ‘I have seen that collie.’

‘Have you?’ asked Desirée. ‘Have you been to Barfield, Mr. Brandon?’

‘No, Mr. Bourne had it at Oxford. I think I saw the picture of the lady to whom he was going to give it.’

‘Is it so? Then that must have been the picture of Miss Stone, for to her he gave the collie. Did you think her visage was lovely?’

‘I think so,’ said Ned doubtfully, ‘but I never look at women—ah! except you, Mademoiselle; they are so stupid—except you,’ he said again, and he smiled good-humouredly as though he knew she understood and would be even pleased.

‘Unhappy one!’ said Desirée, her face and voice full of pity. ‘Perhaps the women you have encountered were not agreeable?’

‘No,’ said Ned, ‘they were all horrid and rude, and some were ugly and tried to make themselves pretty with paint and powder. But you, Mademoiselle, have pretty rosy cheeks without paint. I do like you!’

‘And me, I do like you,’ said Desirée with apparent

simplicity. Do you sometimes walk in the tea-gardens, Mr. Brandon? I go in them each noon—when the sun is warm—with the little ones to walk.'

Here the Squire came to ask Desirée to give them some music, who, graciously acquiescing, was escorted by him to the piano, followed closely by Ned, to Mr. Portal's great surprise and a little to his satisfaction, as hitherto Ned had not tried to hide his dislike of women.

Desirée was musical, and had a melodious voice. She rattled off a lively introduction, and then, with one sly, arch look at Ned, to assure him that she was thinking of him, she sang—

'Tes deux jolis yeux
Qui sont comme les cieux
Ils ont me ravis,' &c.

Ned had no further monopoly of Desirée's company. There was music for the next half-hour or so. Frank, who had a rich baritone voice, sang—

FORGET ME NOT.

Where, love, art thou?
By babbling mountain stream,
Or cavern'd grotto's gleam?
On airy mountain height?
By cascade leaping bright?
O, love! forget me not!

Where, love, art thou?
'Mid towering, stately pines,
Or clamb'ring, clinging vines?
Beside the roadside Cross
Cloth'd round with creeping moss?
O, love! forget me not!

Where, love, art thou ?
 'Mid glances soft and sweet,
 'Mid voices gay or low,
 Where passions spring and fleet
 As breathings come and go ?
 O, love ! forget me not.

Mrs. Genuflex followed, and, in a pleasant soprano, sang—

CONTRASTS.

Oh ! dark and restless sea;
 Mysterious, mighty deep;
 Tomb of a myriad buried loves,
 The desolate do weep !

Oh ! dancing, sparkling sea,
 Breaking on golden sands;
 The blue sky mirror'd on thy breast,
 Thy shells in eager hands !

Oh ! frowning, cloud-capp'd mount,
 'Neath leaden, angry skies;
 We shiver, sadden, and forbode,
 As up we—toiling—rise !

Oh ! soft-limned, beauteous mount
 Against the pearly sky;
 We lightsome tread the flower-gemm'd path
 That leadeth us on high !

Far-reaching, silent wold,
 Enshrouded in pure snow;
 Thy savage beauty chills our soul
 As, pathless, on we go !

But see that same wild waste
 Ere few short months do roll,
 In gorse and heather gorgeous clad—
 Entrancing sense and soul !

Shadow and light, grief, joy,
Chequer our path through Time,
Till—steeped in joy—we're one with Thee,
Eternity sublime!

And in this way the evening sped rapidly and pleasantly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PATIENCE'S ESCAPE.

WHEN Patience had walked and run—in turns—some distance from Underthwaite, she saw, inside a field, a little copse of wood. This, she thought, would be a quiet, secluded spot for her to sit down in, and where she might collect her thoughts and make some plan for the future. She did not dream of facing her father, who, if he would not actually thrash her, would threaten to 'break every bone in her body;' and even his threats were terrible. She had only passed one or two persons on the road, and, just now, there was no one in sight. So she crept into the copse and sat down on a mossy bank by a tiny beck, and stooped to drink some of the limpid water, which quite refreshed her. Instinctively she had taken the road which led to Barton station. She wondered when she would be missed from 'the Den.' Probably not until tea-time, though it was possible that when Miss Lemon's maid was sent to lock the door, she might look in and find that the bird had flown from its cage. But Patience remembered that Fitz-simon had only once looked in on the occasions when she had been sent to lock her in, so

probably she was forbidden to speak to a girl in punishment, or even to go into 'the Den' when she was sent to lock a girl in. Patience's best plan would therefore be to push on as fast as possible to Barton station, and, by taking train, put as great a distance as she could between herself and Underthwaite. She pulled out from her pocket the purse which Miss Curdon had given to her, and, anxiously counting the money which was in it, found that it amounted to several shillings.

'If I could only get to Liverpool!' she thought, 'no one could find me in that big place, and I am tall and strong, and can easily earn my bread in some way. I would rather be a nurse or a shop-girl than stay any longer at that hateful Underthwaite.' Then she remembered how a girl had 'run away' about a year before, and what a hue and cry had been made, and how she herself had anxiously hoped that the girl would escape. But she had been brought back and confined in 'the Den' for days, and then the committee met and decided that she should be publicly expelled. And one day the whole school and the governesses and the servants—even poor, bent old Fielding and drowsy Pebble—were assembled to see and hear the expulsion. The committee sat round a table at the head of the big schoolroom, and Miss Lemon (with *such* a pretty cap on!), with a satirical white face and cold glistening eyes, sat in the midst of them. All the gentlemen of the committee seemed to bow before Miss Lemon, and to be afraid of her, though many of them had white hair. Then the poor terrified

girl—overwhelmed with disgrace, and crushed with misery and semi-starvation and solitude—was brought by one of the governesses from ‘the Den’ and led into the crowded but silent room, down its whole length, until she was left standing in the open space before the large table. Then one of the committee stood up and addressed all present on the heinousness of the dreadful sin of ‘running away from school,’ of the punishment which it brought upon those guilty of it in this world and the next—the punishment in this world being expulsion from school and consequent life-long disgrace. After ingeniously describing the many ways in which this disgrace must be felt throughout life, and the torture it would bring after death, he stretched out his long arm, and, pointing his bony finger at the shrinking girl, he formally pronounced the sentence of expulsion. The poor girl—weak for want of food, and with overstrung nerves from solitude and silence—shrieked aloud and fell prone before her judges, and Patience remembered how angry Mrs. Hunter looked as, clad as usual in a ‘London smoke’ dress, she hurriedly strode down the room, picked up the poor girl, and, laying her head upon her shoulder, bore her from her tormentors.

‘If they should catch me!’ said Patience to herself, looking apprehensively around. ‘I had better not loiter. I may reach Barton by dusk if I hurry,’ and continued her way briskly, feeling as though her pursuers were already nearing her.

Patience reached the station a few minutes only

before the arrival of the train which she wanted to catch. The waning light favoured her, or she might have aroused the suspicions of the station-master (who also issued the tickets, as the little station was so unimportant) as, gasping from fear of pursuit and want of breath, she asked for a third-class ticket to Liverpool, and with trembling hands produced the money to pay for it.

The tension was removed when the guard whistled, and the train, with accelerating speed, left the station further and further behind.

How Patience blessed Miss Curdon ! But for her she might still be hiding in the neighbourhood of Underthwaite, prowling about out-houses in search of a night's shelter, and almost with the certainty of recapture and punishment hanging over her head. But now she felt happy, exultant (in her ignorance of the world and of life), and buoyed up with natural high spirits, and filled with the exquisite pleasure of Hope. She would work and earn, and, by some means, would continue her education—at any rate in her favourite branches—English literature and Music and modern languages. She would not sink to a lower level; she would rise, and all by her own exertions and determination.

Then a thought disquieted her. If they discovered that she had gone, they would make enquiries as to whether she had taken train at Barton. If they found that she had, they would wire to every station and she might be stopped. She remembered having heard someone say once that this train was a fast train, and only

stopped at a few stations. If she could only reach Liverpool! Then she remembered that Miss Threlwal kept the girls' pocket-money, doling it out to them as they needed it. She would tell Miss Lemon that Patience never had much pocket-money, and would, therefore, not be likely to try to go by train, but would try to go home by road. Miss Curdon would know differently, and would hope that Patience would escape, and the thought of her sympathy and remembrance of her, comforted Patience much and banished some of her disquietude.

On rolled the train, stopping here and there at a big town, but darting past the flashing lights of the small stations. Patience's spirits rose as she was borne further and further from Barton and Underthwaite. She felt tired and a little anxious as she neared the great northern metropolis. But her ingenuous ignorance of the world and its ways saved her from much misery.

At last she reached Lime-street Station, and was fairly stunned by the noise and bustle and glare of lights. For a while she stood—lost in wonder—looking and listening. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry and too busy to notice her. At last she bestirred herself, remembering that it was getting late. Fear, too, was creeping into her mind. A young girl—alone and friendless, without money or shelter! What was she in this great sea of humanity surging around her? She would be swamped, bruised, destroyed in the struggle for life. She thought of her mother. If she could only brave her father's anger she

would go to her now. But she dared not face that stern father. Her thoughts turned to Tom. She loved Tom, he was always gentle to her. Had she enough money to go to Barfield? She pulled out her purse and counted—two, three, four shillings, a sixpence, and eight pence. Barfield was about forty miles from Liverpool. Was there a train going that way so late as this? She went to a porter and asked him. Yes, there was the night-mail starting in half-an-hour. Patience resolved that she would go.

Late that night Tom was sitting over his books. The fire burned cheerfully, and the kettle steamed beside it ready for him to make his cup of cocoa as usual. One end of the table was spread with a snowy cloth and requisites for his supper. The brightness of the lamp was softened by a paper shade, and the room looked cosy and warm. Outside, the rain pattered on the window-panes and drip-dropped on the pavement: the wind's sullen moans sometimes rose to a painful shriek.

'God help all poor wanderers and homeless persons this night!' ejaculated Tom devoutly. At that moment there was a ring at the door-bell, and then the opening of the door, followed by voices, sounded up to his room.

'Who can be out so late as this?' he said. 'Some sick person needs me, I suppose;' and he rose to his feet in anticipation of a summons, when, to his astonishment, he heard a well-known voice say—

'Is this his room?'

A moment afterwards Patience entered and rushed

with outstretched arms to her brother. The landlady closed the door and retired.

'Oh Tom! I never was so glad to see anyone in my life!'

The re-action had come. All Patience's courage and capacity for battling with the world had ebbed out at sight of Tom and of the warm, pleasant room which she knew might shelter her. She laid her head upon his shoulder and sobbed and wept. Tom's astonishment was lost in brotherly love and sympathy. He spoke not a word for some time, but pressed his sister to his heart and let her cry on. Presently, when the violence of Patience's emotion was spent, he stroked her hair and kissed her bent head. Then he gently disentangled her arms from his neck, saying cheerfully—

'Of course, you have taken me by surprise, Patience, but I will curb my curiosity and not let you give me any explanation until you have taken food and got warm.'

For indeed, she had been a damp, not to say wet, armful for Tom, who now helped her to remove her damp outer garments, then knelt down and took off her wet shoes and set her feet upon a stool to warm while he went to instruct his landlady to prepare a room for her.

Two hours later the brother and sister were still out of bed. Patience, enveloped in her brother's Oriental dressing-gown, looked the picture of contentment and happiness. She had been fed and warmed, and had then disburdened her heart and conscience to Tom. He

had given her some slight reproofs, but had promised to stand by her and see her safely through her escapade.

He did not think it wise to tell her all his thoughts, which were that Underthwaite was a diabolical place, that his sister was a generous-hearted, mis-judged, and irrationally-treated girl; and that he would take the expense of her keep, and education at the Barfield High School, upon his own shoulders sooner than let her undergo any similar experiences to those she had undergone. Old Genuflex senior did not, metaphorically, escape Tom's lash that night.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CHAT IN THE MORNING ROOM.

THE early autumn sun was shining into Mrs. Bourne's morning room, throwing the swaying shadows of the rose-trails across the carpet. Grace and her mother sat by the window sewing and chatting.

'What an extraordinary girl Desirée is!' said Mrs. Bourne presently. 'Such a mixture of candour and artfulness! I cannot imagine where she imbibed all her worldly wisdom, for she is brimful of it. Her marriage with young Ned Brandon was a clever stroke of business, for business—pure and simple—it was. There was no love nor sentiment about it.'

'She is a queer girl!' said Grace. 'I never cared much for her, though she was amusing, certainly, and I ought to feel grateful to her for having enabled my friends and myself to spend many a lively half-hour in her company.'

'She lost her mother early, and her moral education seems at least to have been neglected,' Mrs. Bourne observed.

'Mary Dart says that she used to meet Ned in the tea-

gardens at Lapton almost every day, and that she used to terrify little Mercy Genuflex and her brothers by promising to drown them in the lake there if they ever told their father and mother about their seeing Ned when they went out with her," said Grace.

'What shocking lessons of deceit and slyness to teach young children, and also of cowardice—moral and physical!—Mary Dart must have had up-hill work with those children after Desirée's care of them!'

'Yes, mother, especially as Desirée was so lively and full of fun that she compelled the children to like her in spite of her terrible threats. They were quite unwilling to lose her even for their "dear Mary Dart."'

'Have you ever met Mr. Brandon, Grace?'

'No, mother, but Frank knew him, and told me a little about him. He said that he was a fine-looking young fellow, but stupid and dull-looking, and seldom spoke to anyone. He said that he disliked women and loved dogs, and spent most of his time in the kennels or rat-hunting with his terriers. Desirée, I heard from Mary Dart, gained a complete hold of Ned—mind and body. He admired and adored her as much as he disliked all other women. She kept up a clandestine correspondence with him for three months after her visit to Lapton Vicarage, while she prepared her plan of elopement and marriage. How puzzled Miss Parker must have been when Desirée was first missed from school! She had been so reticent about her manœuvres that not a soul suspected a marriage. The river was dragged, and search-parties were organised,

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and advertisements inserted in the papers, and detectives employed to unravel the mystery.'

'And all the time Desirée was comfortably ensconced at Nashleigh!' laughed Mrs. Bourne. 'That was the crowning-point of her effrontery.'

'Yes,' laughed Grace, 'she took Ned down to Nashleigh the very day after their marriage, and by her beauty and vivacity thoroughly charmed and conciliated Mr. Portal.'

'Yet,' said Mrs. Bourne, 'his own son completely alienated himself from his father by doing what the nephew seems to have done with impunity. Mr. Portal disinherited his son—a fine, intellectual and most gentlemanly man, whom your father and I have the privilege and honour of knowing intimately—because he preferred to choose his own wife instead of marrying his father's choice for him. This young Ned Brandon was then made Mr. Portal's heir. Desirée bewitched the poor young man—who is very stupid and shallow-minded—with her beauty and liveliness, and married him for his money.'

Just then Dr. Bourne entered the room.

'My dears,' he began, 'young Genuflex has just been to see me. He told me that his high-spirited sister has kicked over the traces and run away from school. There is no need to mention the fact to anyone. Under the name of "Evangelicalism" the régime at Underthwaite is stricter than that of any nunnery, and I think the girl is almost justified in escaping from a most unnatural life.

I want you to be very kind and friendly to Patience. You are likely to see a great deal of her, as I have advised Genuflex to keep her here for a time and send her to the High School.

Grace was delighted at the prospect of having a new friend to add to her already long list. Mrs. Bourne, always sympathetic and kind, cordially promised to befriend Patience.

* So the life of the latter at Barfield promised fairly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CHRISTENING.

MR. and Mrs. Portal were entertaining a few of their neighbours at luncheon. It was an eventful day to the family at Nashleigh, for Ned Brandon's infant son had that day been Christened. Desirée was radiant with happiness and with beauty, and felt and looked full of importance, for had she not presented her husband with an heir-presumptive to the Nashleigh estates? Mr. Portal was happy, for if his heir—Ned Brandon—was stupid (if not worse), Desirée's child might prove to be a genius—she was so bright and clever herself. So old Portal, taking his Rector, Laing, into his confidence, built castles in the air for his grand-nephew. He had named him Frederick after himself—not flinching from his resolution when his wife besought him with tears not to name the child by the same name as her own long-lost son had been called. 'That young man was a rebel, let us dismiss him for ever from our thoughts,' said Mr. Portal bitterly. He did not seem to remember that his heir—Ned Brandon—had as little sought his leave to marry, or sought his uncle's help in making his choice of a wife, as his son had done.

The god-parents had bestowed as choice and costly presents on the little heir-presumptive as Desirée, who loved pretty baubles, could wish. The infant had behaved like a Stoic during the ordeal of his Christening, beyond a gasp or two when the cold water lighted on his sensitive skin, uttering no sound. At the servants' dinner, the old house-keeper shook her head ominously when this fact was mentioned, and said, 'It's never good to see a child Christened and him or her not to cry when the cold water touches them. It's a true sign of bad luck!' The servants all shook their heads, and each in turn recounted instances of children dying or being kidnapped or followed by misfortune because they had not made their voices heard in lamentation at their Christening.

After the Christening-cake had been cut and the presents displayed and discussed, the hero of the day was brought in to be inspected by the company. There was quite a flutter of expectancy as they awaited his advent, for the font had been far from the Nashleigh sittings in the church, and none of them had, as yet, seen or heard the baby.

The white-gowned and white-capped nurse soon appeared, bearing a white satin, embroidered and lace-trimmed pillow of softest down on which lay a cloud of costly lace. At first sight there seemed to be nothing but lace, but as the pillow was presented to each guest in turn, a tiny, waxen face could be discerned. The gentlemen looked puzzled—some even afraid—as they inspected the infant. The ladies in turn looked grave.

'A delicate child, I fear !' said one.

'He might be stronger,' said another.

'Poor little lamb !' said a third pityingly.

'Ah !' said one expressively, lifting her hands.

The tiny speck of humanity was only one month old, but bore little resemblance to the lusty, chubby pink cherubs which most of the mothers present had brought to the font in their time. Desirée noticed the silence and the gravity which had fallen upon the party since her baby's appearance, but with her usual light-heartedness tried to dissipate the cloud which had arisen.

'My baby seems to have frightened you,' she laughingly said. 'It is not big and red and strong like a cottager's baby, but that is because it has Nashleigh blood in its veins. Many well-born babies are small and delicate, but grow to be fine fellows by-and-by; and my little Fred will grow big and strong too as he grows older,' and Desirée stooped over the now sleeping child and kissed its brow.

Ned was amazed at the new position in which he found himself—as a father. He had fallen acquiescently and happily into the position of husband—such as it was. Desirée controlled his every action, but warily and sagaciously. She mapped out his daily life for him, taking care, however, that his lines should fall in pleasant places. He was, unintermittently, her devoted and most admiring slave. She rode and drove and walked and lounged, yes—and ratted with him. She visited the stables and kennels with him, and taught him to play billiards and

whist—or tried to teach him. She sent him from her side—yes often—when he became *ennuyant*; sent him to town, or to see a neighbour, or even to dole out charity from ‘Mrs. Brandon,’ thereby winning much undeserved love and gratitude from the poor on the Nashleigh estate—for the poor are grateful. Then, to reward him for his far-off adoration—his obedient service—she occasionally allowed him to caress her without rebuke, and Ned was in the seventh heaven, and believed, poor fool, that no one in the whole world was so happy as Desirée’s husband.

But to be a father, and the father of the heir-presumptive of Nashleigh, was quite a different position. There was no sweetness in this, but there was much pride in it. Everyone who met him on the road, in the hunting-field, in the drawing-room, or in the street, asked so urgently about his little son. They forgot even to ask about his dogs or to talk of the last ‘meet.’ It was now, ‘And how is little Master Brandon?’ or, ‘How is the sweet baby?’

And this baby was his own and Desirée’s! Mr. Portal rejoiced over it, Desirée fondled it, Mrs. Portal wept over it (why should she, he wondered!). The whole routine of pleasure and duties at Nashleigh had to be re-arranged on its account. The dinner-hour had been altered by half-an-hour, though, from time immemorial, the Nashleigh dinner-hour had been seven o’clock. For this tiny atom of humanity a range of sunny rooms had been fitted up, and a whole staff of servants engaged, including a groom whose sole duty was to be on the alert to take the chief nurse and her precious charge for a sunning or an

airing whenever practicable. For the doctor had pronounced the precious child to be 'delicate,' and had opined that it would be best for it to exist as much as possible in the open air. All this expense and trouble being taken about his child re-acted upon Ned, who began to realise his own importance as heir of Nashleigh. This feeling influenced his bearing and movements, and the more he realised his important position as the father of the little heir-presumptive, the higher he held his head and the more he expected attention, deference—even admiration.

Desirée's cup of happiness overflowed with sweetness and sparkled with joy. Old Mr. Portal expanded under her gay influence; Mrs. Portal smiled sadly at her merry chatter and her thorough enjoyment of the luxuries of life. The stately old servants smiled benignly at her pretty affectation of imperiousness, and the younger servants, male and female, fulfilled her—often unreasonable—behests with alacrity for the sake of one of her bright smiles or winning words. Now, to add to all her joys, she had her child. Desirée was no model mother. If she had been poor, she would have found it irksome to tend and care for her baby. But she had all—and more than she wanted—of this world's goods. She had felt her heart stir with a touch of Nature when her babe had first been placed in her arms. But she had seen, comparatively, little of it since, and was growing to think of it more as the heir-presumptive to her uncle-in-law's estate and wealth than as her child. Feeling thus,

and noting the waxen, fragile face, she often feared that her baby would not live, and consequently was most solicitous in her daily enquires about and inspection of him. Ned wonderingly noted Desirée's apparent devotion to the child, and would curiously peer into its face when he met it in its nurse's arms in the Park. Desirée would not trust Ned with her secret thoughts, but let him believe that it was her motherly love which made her so anxious to see it thrive.

'Uncle,' he said one day to Mr. Portal, 'it is odd how much Desirée loves the baby! She thinks more about it than I do of Nip or Dart.'

Mr. Portal smiled kindly at Ned.

'Women—good women,' he corrected himself, 'all love their infants, and many bad women too. Perhaps you still love your dogs best, my boy, but when the little man grows and gets strong, and is able to hunt and rat with you, you will love him more than all your dogs.'

'It will be nice to see my own son hunt or call the dogs,' said Ned holding his head high. For some time after he remained in a pleased reverie, till Desirée came in—a basket of Edith Gifford roses on her arm. Going up to Ned she laughed gaily.

'You are thinking of our boy, Ned; I know you are! you always look like that when you think of him.'

'Yes, I was. How do you know, 'Rée?' and Ned's head was lowered and his eyes fell as he felt how clever his beautiful young wife was.

'Oh! I can read all your thoughts whenever I want

to, Ned,' said Desirée lightly, and Ned believed her, and blushed and hung his head until she bent forward and touched his forehead with her warm, rosy lips. He looked up smiling gladly then.

'Come, Ned, and help me to arrange these roses for the dinner-table,' and she took him by the hand as though he were a child and led him away.

Mr. Portal smiled and sighed. 'How blessed we all are to have met this lively, sweet, and clever girl. She will make a man of poor Ned yet.'

CHAPTER XXX.

A SOUL'S FLITTING.



BROUGHAM stood before the hall-door at Nashleigh. Presently Mr. Portal and another gentleman came out earnestly conversing.

'All that can be done has been done, my dear sir. I believe that there is not the slightest hope of the child living until the morning,' said the old white-haired doctor.

'It is a great disappointment to me,' said Mr. Portal gloomily.

'Well, I never believed that the child could be reared,' said the doctor; 'it was weak from its birth. Even if it lived, it would have been a puny, pitiable thing. I am sorry for the poor father.'

'The mother you mean,' said Mr. Portal.

'I mean the father,' said the doctor gravely. 'It will be a blow to him which he will long suffer from. The mother has more elasticity of temperament and will soon get over it.'

They shook hands, and the brougham went rapidly down the drive and was soon out of sight. For some moments Mr. Portal stood before the entrance in deep

thought. 'Man proposes, God disposes,' he muttered, and re-entered the house.

There was a silent group in the day-nursery. The blinds were all drawn down to shut out the brilliant sunshine. A fire burned in the grate, near which the elderly nurse sat with the tiny atom of suffering humanity on a pillow on her lap. Desirée was huddled up on her knees on the floor with her head buried in her arms upon the seat of a chair, sobbing and moaning. Ned stood near the nurse—tearless, but with white face, open mouth, and frightened eyes fixed upon the dying infant. Mrs. Portal sat near with a cup in her hand, from which, now and again, she took a tiny drop of liquid in a spoon and put it to the lips of the child—hopelessly, but as in duty bound to do. Now and then the baby uttered a feeble wail, then, with blue-encircled mouth and eyes, it lay still, but for a fitful gasp. —All present knew that its hours were numbered, nay—that perhaps in a few minutes its little soul would have fled.

'Why should *my* baby die?' moaned Desirée. 'We all desire it to live, and it would have all things to make it happy. Why should not the baby of some *poor* woman be chosen to die, who would leave plenty of brothers and sisters behind and would never be missed?'

Then, rising, she bent down and looked intently into the baby's face.

'While there's life there can be hope,' she said. 'I shall send for another doctor. Old Hawkins is not up-to-date; but that new doctor is very clever they say.'

Mr. Portal will pleasantly give much wealth to him to cure my baby and cause him to live,' and Desirée hurriedly pulled the bell.

But already the Angel of Death was hovering near, and Mrs. Portal—seeing the shadow of its wings—solemnly laid one deterring hand on Desirée's arm, and with the other pointed to the child. The girl turned and saw that all was over !

'Too late !' she almost shrieked, and fled from the room.

Mrs. Portal pressed a kiss upon the infant's brow, inwardly saying, 'Thank God.' Then tenderly she led the stricken father from the room.

A few days later, with much pomp, the body of the little heir-presumptive was laid in the Nashleigh vault. The interesting, bereaved young mother sobbed audibly during the funeral service as—clad in clinging white crêpon—she bent her head upon her husband's arm. Ned stood erect, his face white, his eyes staring stonily at the tiny white satin coffin with its silver embellishments, which held his beloved Desirée's dead baby; that mysterious little being which he had at first wondered about, but which afterwards had crept into his heart and stirred it as not even his best-loved dog could do, as Desirée herself had failed to do !

'The poor mother seems broken-hearted,' remarked one, as Desirée mourned for the inheritance which she feared might have vanished with her baby.

'What a stolid, heartless young man that must be,' said

another. 'The grief of his young wife ought to affect him even if he does not mourn the loss of his baby.'

Ned's grief was too deep for tears or words. He only half understood it, but there was a dull aching pain at his heart, and for days he moped about scarcely touching his meals, and not caring for or enquiring about his dogs. Old Doctor Hawkins shook his head when Mr. Portal consulted him about his nephew.

'Send him abroad for a bit. Let him have a short sea-voyage, and then send him to some lively health resorts on the Continent.'

When the subject was mooted to Desirée, she appeared almost unwilling to leave Nashleigh. 'For poor Ned's sake though' she would 'do anything.' Finally it was arranged that a suitable travelling companion being found—the Doctor's advice should be acted upon.

Desirée had difficult work to suppress all signs of the excitement which pervaded her whole being—mind and body. She could settle to nothing. During the numerous calls of condolence which she received, she found it all but impossible to restrain her volubility and excitable manner.

'Poor girl!' said one, 'how bravely she bears her sorrow! It strikes me, however, that she is quite feverish, and I should not be at all surprised that before she can go for a change she will be laid up with brain-fever or something.'

It was a relief to Desirée when they had left Nashleigh far behind. One bugbear she must get rid of however—

her travelling-companion. This she did as soon as they reached London, paying her a quarter's salary as compensation for her abrupt dismissal, and pleading to her as an excuse for that dismissal that a young friend of hers—who was poor—was in need of such a post, and that she felt that she had the first claim upon her. The 'young friend' being a myth, Desirée replaced the 'companion' by a smart lady's maid who was *au fait* at hair-dressing and personal titivation in general; and, thus equipped, and Ned being, as ever, her willing slave, she began her travels.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BUTTERFLY'S FLUTTERING.

THE Earl of Ravendale had not long embarked on the sea of London life. His father, the Duke of Helm, provided him with an ample allowance which some of the members of a 'fast set' of which he soon found himself the leader, helped him to spend.

It was while staying at Paris over the Carnival that he met Desirée. Her flashing, laughing eyes and lively ways attracted him, and as he was handsome, rich, and *à la mode*, he found no difficulty in being introduced to her and her cypher of a husband. His open admiration was delightful to the foolish, vain girl, especially as he lavished costly presents upon her and seemed to have an unfathomable pocket.

Ned was always easily disposed of, obeying Desirée's every behest with the docility of a well-trained spaniel. So he was entertained by some of the Earl's intimates, while Desirée went hither and thither from one mad scene of gaiety and pleasure to another with Lord Ravendale.

For a while this young nobleman was infatuated by the

gay, beautiful, but unscrupulous French girl. He thought he loved her, and felt willing to be her adorer for ever; and as her husband, if not complaisant, was most easily deluded, no misgivings as to a *dénouement*, or apprehension that Desirée's reputation might suffer, troubled him.

One night, they had just returned from the Théâtre Française to the luxuriously furnished rooms where they were staying. Lord Ravendale helped Desirée to remove the richly-trimmed cloak of ruby velvet, trimmed with white ostrich feathers, then, placing her in a downy lounge, he settled himself upon the rug at her feet to feast his eyes upon her beauty.

'Cleopatra could not rival you to-night, *ma mie*.'

'Do you really think so?' laughed Desirée, and clapped her jewelled hands for joy.

'Your eyes are brighter than the spray of diamonds in your hair, your teeth are pearls, your cheeks are fairer than the rose, your form is divine, your smile is bewitching, your —'

'Stop, I do pray you!' interrupted Desirée, 'that is enough of praise for one poor little head to carry in one night. Besides, so many others did whisper praises in my ear to-night —'

'Confound it!' ejaculated the Earl, hotly. 'Who dared to take such liberties with you?'

'Lion, you are in one tornado; but it is good to have so much praise from all, for then I am assured that I am one to be loved by you. Only *your* praise is worth to me, Lionel. The praise of others I love it not for its own

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sake, but only to tell me I am worth for you to love,' and Desirée bent down and wreathed her full white arms round his neck, while she kissed him on the forehead.

Lord Ravendale's face brightened as he returned her kiss with interest.

'Look here, Desirée, if you are not true to me I will shoot your lover like a dog and leave you to your idiot husband. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' said she, smiling gaily, but with the grip of fear upon her heart. 'I have no fear.'

'Why, then, do you not send Ned home and tell him that you never want to see him again?'

'Because if I give up Ned altogether, Lion, I shall be poor. You are good to me, but if you died, poor Desirée must starve. If Ned dies, I shall have money all the same.'

'Is that all? Then I promise to settle upon you double what you would get from the Portals as Ned's widow. Will you give up Ned now?'

'Yes, with all joy,' said Desirée: 'you have all my love, Ned has none, only some pity, poor boy, for he has given all his love to me.'

'Then to-morrow he shall go back to Nashleigh,' said the Earl decidedly, 'and let the world talk if it likes. I do not care a button for it.'

'Nor I either!' said Desirée, as she jumped up from her lounging position, and, waving her arms over her head, performed an original but most graceful dance, while the Earl delightedly feasted his eyes upon her every motion.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER OF DESIRÉE'S TOYS BROKEN.



R. PORTAL had again spent a few days at Lapton with his old college chum, and at his pressing invitation, Frank had promised to come and shoot the Nashleigh covers after Christmas.

One evening, after a good day's sport, he sent the gamekeeper and beaters homewards with the 'bag,' while he went down to the village to send a wire to his father mentioning the hour of his return. As he walked towards the station he saw a young man in the distance about whose figure or dress he seemed to fancy there was something familiar to him. As he drew nearer, Frank, with great surprise, recognised Ned Brandon—but Ned Brandon with all the life evaporated out of him. His pace was slow, his head was bent, and when Frank hailed him he raised his lack-lustre eyes from the ground and scarcely seemed to recognise him.

'What, Ned! What brings you here? Where is Desirée?'

Ned stood stock-still, his eyelids quivering, his lips twitching. At last he blurted out—

'I am never going from Nashleigh again.'

'Where is Desirée?' again asked Frank.

A look of mute agony filled the poor young man's face. His lips worked convulsively, but no words came out of his mouth.

Frank grasped his arm firmly, saying—

'Ned, you must tell me where you left Desirée.' His mind was filled with vague fears. There was some trouble, some mystery, and it must not be sprung suddenly upon his good friends the Portals.

At length Ned found voice—

'Desirée has left me.'

A tear dropped as he spoke.

'Desirée left you!' said Frank in a low startled voice. 'What do you mean, Ned? Where have you left her?'

'I haven't left her,' said Ned doggedly; 'she has left me.'

Frank stood still and grasped Ned's arm.

'Wait, Ned, I will go no further until you have told me all that you know. It would make Mrs. Portal very ill—perhaps kill her—if you went home suddenly and told her this. Where is Desirée?'

'I do not know,' said Ned.

'Who is with her?' asked Frank.

'A tall, fair gentleman, who gives her plenty of pretty things, and always took her from me since we met him in Paris.'

'Did he travel with you?'

'Yes,' said Ned.

'And stay with you?'

'Yes, with Desirée, not with me,' answered Ned.

'What is his name?' asked Frank.

'I don't know. Desirée calls him Lion, and Earl, and King. They used to leave me alone.'

'But, Ned, what made you come home?'

'She left me,' Ned said shortly.

'For how long?' asked Frank.

'How long? how long?' muttered Ned. 'She was not coming back this time,' he added in a pained voice.

'Who told you so, Ned?'

'Desirée told me. Oh! Frank, she was a beauty! and so clever! and merry! She kissed me good-bye, and said that I had been good, but she wanted a man who could laugh and talk and sing, and not be afraid of her as I was.'

Poor Ned looked abjectly miserable; his face was pale, his cheeks hollow, his eyes lustreless, and yet, when he spoke of his faithless, heartless, but beautiful wife, his features lighted up. He could not appraise the injury she had done to him, and, like an ill-treated spaniel, would have joyfully flown to her side if she had called him.

Frank Bourne's heart ached for him. Tenderly he reached out his hand and drew Ned's arm protectingly within his own—as he inwardly anathematised Desirée and all heartless women—and led him to the house where he had been so intensely happy, which he had left

almost broken-hearted at the death of his infant, and to which he now returned to spend the miserable remainder of his life—always longing for—but in vain—the presence and the caresses of a beautiful woman who had made of his heart a shuttlecock.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PESTILENCE STALKS ITS VICTIMS.

BARFIELD looked very sleepy one July evening. It had been a broiling hot day. Pitilessly the sun poured down its floods of scorching heat upon the pavements, and the glare of the white houses dazzled the eyes as they reflected the light. Presently, a few silent people were seen slowly wending their ways through the silent streets; as their footfalls echoed, here and there, a person would emerge from his or her house and exchange a quiet greeting with the passers-by—all of whom wore tokens of mourning. One wore a nurse's uniform, and though her tread was light, she moved rapidly as though her time was too precious to be wasted in walking. Two minutes afterwards a clergyman followed, taking the same direction as the Sister. She must have paused to speak to someone, for soon he overtook her.

Tom Genuflex, for he was the priest, looked like Peace embodied. No shadow of trouble or anxiety rested on his pale, powerful face. His step was light, but firm, his figure thin, but wiry. He moved quickly,

with long strides, as though to him, too, time was precious. His eyes had a penetrating but placid expression, as though they saw far, and were satisfied with what they looked upon.

The Sister turned as she heard him close behind her. It was Grace Bourne—who had found happiness in the Religious Life.

‘I am glad that you are getting a breath of fresh air, Mr. Genuflex,’ she said, as she held out her hand in greeting.

‘It is most refreshing!’ replied Tom. ‘How are your patients progressing, Sister?’

‘The two in Riverbank Lane will recover, Dr. Trimmer thinks. There are four fresh cases in Hammond Street, one very bad, one slight, the other two serious. The care of the living will soon be as great a problem as that of the sick. What is to be done with the widow and five children of the man who has been buried to-day?’

‘I have just heard that cholera has seized the eldest child, and she has been carried to the Hospital. What a pity it is that all cases are not discovered in time to be put there, and so keep the pestilence within bounds! I am going there now, Sister. I suppose you have much to do before you come?’

‘Only a few cases to see. Pray try to get a little rest, Mr. Genuflex. I do not believe you have had half a night’s rest for the last fortnight!’

‘I am as strong as a horse, Sister, and need very little

sleep. When this work is over, then I shall rest sweetly, making up all deficiencies of this busy, sad time.'


The summer had been hot and dry, the early autumn unusually wet. The air reeked with decaying vegetable matter, for the hot earth seemed to seethe the falling leaves in the copious rain which fell upon its warm bosom. Before the equinoctial gales had arrived to sweep the miasmatic exhalations from wood and field, sickness broke out—'English cholera,' the doctor called it. Barfield had doubled its population within the last ten years or so, for it was centrally situated and three or four railways converged there, and small factories had been also started, so that almost before the little community awoke to the fact, it could be called a populous town. The sanitary condition of the place was far from what it ought to have been, and though the Medical Officer of Health and Dr. Bourne had tried to rouse the authorities to remove the insanitary state of affairs, to improve the drainage-system, and to see to the purity of the water supply, disease had caught them napping, and proved to be a tough and obstinate enemy to deal with.

Everything was done that could be done under existing conditions. A temporary hospital was erected, an extra medical man was employed, a band of 'sisters' tended the sick, disinfectants were lavishly distributed. Cases of cholera were at once isolated, but almost without effect, for the general cause of the outbreak remained though the patients were carried away. Deaths were frequently increasing in numbers. Tom Genuflex not

only visited the sick and administered the consolations of religion to the dying, as also did Dr. Bourne, but almost daily might be seen carrying a woman or child wrapped up in blankets to the Hospital. No fatigue seemed too great for him; no considerations of danger weighed with him for one moment. He was there in the midst of sickness and death, and his duty seemed quite plain to him. He used the ordinary means of disinfection and precaution, and was entirely free from fear. It was a solemn, soul-uplifting time to him, and he felt it to be a great privilege to do as Christ would have done—to heal the sick in spirit, if not successful in healing their bodies.

Tom found Patience an invaluable help at this time. He would not allow her, as she had at first wished, to personally attend the sick, but she made puddings and nourishing soups, and prepared jellies for her brother to carry to the stricken; and made flannel jackets for the convalescent, and little garments for the many motherless children who were not only orphans but naked, so to speak. Mrs. Bourne and her housekeeper were kept equally busy. She had many willing helpers in providing for the sick and friendless—none more willing than the two widows—Mrs. Caile and Mrs. Bennett.

Eagerly all the more intelligent people of Barfield awaited the first touch of frost, hoping that a rigorous winter might stamp out the disease.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

RETRIBUTION.



LADY and gentleman stood at the window of a hotel in the High Street, Barfield. The hotel stood at the head of the street and looking down it, so that it commanded a good view of the street.

‘This seems a dull sort of place,’ exclaimed Lord Ravendale to Desirée, who hung upon his arm for the purpose of detaining him at the window. ‘See, that is the second funeral which has passed this window this morning.’

‘There are many dull places besides Barfield,’ retorted Desirée, ‘and you see funerals everywhere, though,’ she added in a lower tone, ‘one does not often see two so close together. The first one proceeded to the chapel, but this goes to the church. Do look, Lionel,’ she added in an excited tone. ‘There is the beautiful clergyman who did love me! Is he not one to be loved? Such a distinguished air has he and eyes; *mon Dieu*, they are grand!’

Contrary to the usual practice of meeting the corpse at the church gate, Tom Genuflex, in these troublous times, accompanied it from the house of the mourners to its last

resting-place, vested in pure white surplice and purple stole, and holding aloft a brazen, jewelled Cross. He felt that his presence and the sight of that sacred emblem strengthened and comforted the mourners, and allayed the fears of the townspeople, who, so far, and greatly owing to his example, had been kept from panic.

‘The sight of him seems to excite you much, Desirée,’ said Lord Ravendale, discontentedly. ‘Did you love him? Do you love him now?’


‘Me!’ ejaculated Desirée, in a tone of injured innocence. ‘Have I not told you Lionel that I never loved but you?’

‘Yet it seems strange that you so much insisted upon coming this way to go to Scotland, and were so very anxious to see the place once more!’

‘You are always jealous, Lionel! Me, I only wished to see Barfield, where I lived so long, and had such good friends. Them I must not see, they would not speak to me if I did, but I cannot forget those happy days.’

‘You told me you never were happy till you met me, Desirée. How often you do contradict yourself!’

Desirée laughed. ‘The women do not think what they speak. They are like one time-teller on top of a church. One day they look like this, one day they look like that. What matters it if I go to change my word every minute? I am pretty, I am young. All the men do turn their heads to look at me. I look only one little look, then they look long, and but that you look savage by my side like one great English bull-dog, they would



talk to me and attend me. But I love my bull-dog and like him to frighten them all away. I am all for you, Lionel—only you !’

She seemed so transparent, was always so gay. What wonder then, when she put up her lips for a kiss, that Lionel trusted her and was happy.

Even while she kissed him, Desirée was thinking of Tom Genuflex, and wishing that Lionel’s purse and Tom’s looks could have gone together for her. How handsome and strong and sweet he looked as he passed just now ! Had he forgotten her, she wondered ?

As they passed through the hall on their way to take a walk for Desirée to see the old familiar places, they met the landlady, who bowed deferentially as they passed. Was there not a coronet on the trinkets on the dressing-tables of their rooms ?

Lord Ravendale remarked to her that ‘two funerals had lately passed the windows. Was it not strange ?’ The landlady looked confused, for she had not mentioned, as in duty bound to have done, the prevalent sickness to her guests. Fearing that, as they were going out, they would hear of it, she said quietly—

‘There has been a good deal of sickness about lately. In autumn there often is.’

Lord Ravendale bowed and passed on.

No sooner were they outside than Desirée said—

‘I did not like that woman’s looks. They were sly, like one cat. You must ask about the sickness.’

In a few minutes they had had a full and most graphic

account of it from a poor woman who had lost her husband. Desirée almost shrieked with fright as she heard of the many who had died in torture.

Vainly did Lord Ravendale try to pacify her as they walked back to the hotel.

‘Come away from here, Lionel, at once! Let us go by the next train. We shall die if we stay here! I do not want to die, especially here. They would find out that it was Desirée, and shake their heads and say: “She deserved to die, she was naughty.”’

Her eyes were strained, her cheeks white, her hands trembled. Lord Ravendale tried to soothe her, but in vain.

‘We will telegraph for them to meet us by the mail to-morrow morning,’ he assured her. ‘We will leave here this evening. Do not alarm yourself needlessly. Come and sing to me, pet; the hours will soon pass.’

Desirée seated herself at the piano; her fingers strayed over the keys—seemingly without aim—until at last she found herself playing Beethoven’s ‘*Marche funebre*.’ As the melancholy harmonies were educed, the frightened look again came into her face, the strained look into her eyes. Lord Ravendale stood looking through the window, his back turned to her, but feeling most susceptible to the funereal strains, now sounding loud like a solemn death-knell, now dying away in pathetic mournfulness. Suddenly he turned in wonder, for Desirée had never played any but gay and lively tunes before. Her white face filled him with alarm: he sprung to her side, and in a moment she was in his arms sobbing.

'My darling! what ails you? Why did you play that doleful dirge? It has upset you.'

'Lionel, that is my death-dirge. I feel it. I shall never leave Barfield. Soon Tom Genuflex will be bearing the Cross before my dead body, and they will be laying me in the ground for worms to feast upon me. I feel it coming!' Her voice became weak, her arms relaxed their hold round her lover's neck. He knew that she had fainted. Laying her inanimate form upon the sofa, Lord Ravendale rang for help.

Restoratives were administered, and Desirée returned to consciousness. But the pangs of cholera were upon her. All that money could do was done for her. A special doctor was wired for from London, and a nurse. Lord Ravendale was assiduous in his care and devotion, not flinching from being at her side whenever he was allowed to be there, though her distorted face, so lovely only a few hours ago, was most painful for him to look upon, and her agonies were frightful for him to witness.

Tom Genuflex was sent for to administer consolation, little expecting to find Desirée in the 'beautiful and rich lady' who was spoken of to him.

Before she sank into her last stupor she recognised him.

Bending low he said—

'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Do you *believe*, Desirée?'

'I am too tired,' she whispered.

'Say "I believe," Desirée.'

'Do you forgive me?' she asked faintly.

'Think of God only,' said Tom urgently. Say "I believe in God."'

'I believe in God,' she whispered.

'And in Jesus Christ,' he dictated anxiously.

'Too tired,' was all he heard.

Those were her last words. Her fears were verified.

At Lord Ravendale's request Tom Genuflex buried Desirée privately and quietly, and if there was any gossip it was soon smothered in the troubles and sympathies of the smitten people of Barfield.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RAVAGES OF THE STORM.

THE cholera had finished its work at Barfield, and had passed to other fields to stalk its game. Dark winter, with its short days of suffering and long nights of tears (and weariness of life for some), was making way for joyous, life-inspiring spring. Already the graves of the cholera victims were insistently preaching the Resurrection-lesson, for pale, meek snowdrops uprose amid their spear-like leaves of glaucous-green from the brown earth which lay upon the dead hearts beneath. More gaily sang the constant robin as he perched himself upon a head-stone and gave vent to his delightful feelings of Life and Love in a flood of rapturous song.

Barfield looked very much as it had looked on any fine spring day for the past few years. Comparatively few, as they passed through the streets, or followed their daily callings at home or in the mill or field, gave more than a passing thought to the scourge which had so lately visited them. A dim-eyed woman as she bent over the wash-tub might lift the corner of her apron to

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wipe away her tears as she remembered the strong arm, the loving heart, which she had lost. Or a strong man—when work was over, might grasp the hand of his little one, and, forgetting its small capacity for motion, might walk with it for miles into the country—the little feet running, while the man, with his heart still full of sorrow for his lost life-companion, walked on mechanically with a man's long step, until the constant tripping of the child recalled him to its weakness, and, snatching it to his bosom, he bore it—his only treasure—to his desolated home.

Mrs. Bourne and Grace and others had now leisure to carry out the good parish work which had been planned and begun by Tom Genuflex. To Grace it was, she felt, the work of her life to feed and succour Christ's lambs in the shape of children, the sick, and the fallen. She had found in Patience an able and willing coadjutor, but Patience had other work now to do.

For weeks together during the dreadful time of pestilence, Tom Genuflex had not known a night's rest. He tended the sick bodily as well as spiritually; for in caring for the body he found most opportunity of ministering to the soul. The winter had been exceptionally rigorous, which was favourable to the stamping out of the epidemic. But it was more than even Tom's strong constitution could bear to be pent up for hours in a hot sick-room, and then to emerge into the raw or frosty winter air. Time after time this happened, and more than once he had taken a violent cold. He used remedies, it is true, but

no solicitude about his own health would prevent him from ministering to the sick and especially the dying. So the repeated colds fixed themselves upon his lungs, and in spite of the best medical aid or the most expensive remedies which Dr. Bourne procured for him, he was brought in a few weeks to the brink of an open grave by a rapid consumption.

Let us look into Tom Genuflex's sitting-room. At the table sits Patience writing busily, at intervals looking up and listening as though being dictated to. Her face is calm, but see, she furtively wipes away a tear, and as she smiles there is a quiver in her lip. Ah! is this Tom? the lithe, wiry young man of a few months ago? He sits in a chair propped up on all sides by pillows: his face is thin, and, but for a patch of colour in one cheek, very pale. His eyes shine from their cavernous depths, and a bright smile illumines his features. As he dictates to Patience his voice sounds weak and husky, and occasionally he is torn by a hacking cough, and his breathing becomes hurried.

Quietly, as one of these fits ended, and Tom's head lay back on the pillow, Patience came and knelt by his side and gently laid her head on his arm. His long thin fingers wandered caressingly through her dark curls.

'What is it, dear?' he asked.

Patience bravely tried to restrain her tears, but they had been too long repressed, and, for once, she utterly broke down. For some time Tom let her sob on, his own eyes being moist. At length he asked again, gently—

'What is it, Patience dear—Patience by name, and Patience by second nature?' he said, smilingly.

'Oh! Tom, will you not send for mother? She might do you good.'

'Patience, dear, I do not want to put more sorrow than necessary into mother's life. It would be a great inconvenience to father if she came from home. She need know nothing until I am gone. It would make it harder for me to go if I saw mother's grief at losing her first-born. But it would hurt her if she did not look upon my face and shed her tears upon my coffin and my grave. So when the end comes, wire to her, but warily, so as not to shock her.'

He paused often as he spoke, and when he had ended he sank back again, and his sister put a spoonful of wine to his lips. He swallowed it and smiled. After an interval he said—

'I hope to finish dictating to you the address to the dear people, *my* people, some of them, whom I have "turned unto Righteousness." You remember the promise, Patience? They that turn many to Righteousness—'

'Shall shine as the stars in glory,' said Patience, quietly, as she saw that Tom's breath failed him.

'I do not seem to want to shine,' said Tom, musingly, 'unless it means that they shall be warmed and lightened with the love of our Lord. Warmth and Light! All persons love light and warmth. Death is dark, but Life

is Light. Love is warm. Life and Love! Light and Warmth! Life and Love!

His voice sounded weak, but a smile of ineffable sweetness brightened his face. He held Patience's hand.

'Lay me near my dear people, Patience, and stay here, if Dr. Bourne will let you, to work amongst those whom I have tried to lead in the right way, the way which leads to Life and Love. When the Rector comes to give me the Blessed Sacrament to-morrow, Patience, I should like you to share with me in the Sacrificial Feast. It will be the last time.'

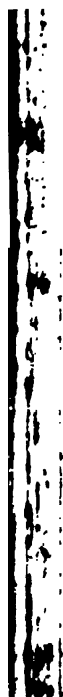
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They laid him, as he had wished, amongst those whom in life he had tried to guide; in sickness, had tended; in the hour of death, had inspirited and comforted. 'Greater love hath no man than this—that a man should lay down his life for his brother,' and this Tom Genuflex had done.

Surely as the fiat went forth that this pure soul should, so early, return to the God Who gave it, the angel-choirs of Heaven voiced an anthem as rare as it was grand—

'OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY.'

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